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The 2003  
CANADIAN UFO SURVEY:  
an analysis of UFO reports  
in Canada

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# The 2003 Canadian UFO Survey

## Overview

Since 1989, UFOROM has been soliciting UFO case data from all known and active investigators and researchers in Canada. Our goal has been to provide data for use by researchers as they try to understand this controversial phenomenon. No comparable studies are currently produced by any other research group in North America. The only known similar program is one in Sweden, where UFO report data is analysed by the Archives for UFO Research. They have lists of Swedish UFO sightings from 1997 to the present online. 2003 thus marks our fifteenth year of collecting and analysing Canadian UFO report data. UFOROM presently has UFO data from 1993 to the present available online, and is working to add earlier national case data to the database.

## The 2003 Canadian UFO Survey: Summary of Results

< There were 673 UFO sightings reported in Canada in 2003 or nearly two each day.

< There were about 39 per cent more UFO reports in 2003 than 2002. The number of UFO reports per year in Canada has increased almost 350 per cent since 1998.

< British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec all had all-time record high numbers of UFOs reported in 2003.

< In 2003, about 17 per cent of all UFO reports were unexplained. This percentage of unknowns falls to about seven per cent when only high-quality cases are considered.

< Most UFO sightings have two witnesses.

< The typical UFO sighting lasted approximately 10 minutes in 2003.

The most important findings of this study include the fact that the number of UFO sightings in Canada has increased over the past fifteen years, and 2003 saw an all-time record high number of sightings reported. People continue to 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. The continued reporting of UFOs by the public

and the yearly increase in numbers of UFO reports suggests a need for further examination of the phenomenon by social, medical and/or physical scientists.

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**Note: A toll-free telephone number to report UFO sightings in Canada has become operational. This A UFO Hotline@ is: 1-866-262-1989.**

**Raison D= etre**

Why bother to collect UFO reports? In one sense, the answer may be as simple as A because they= re there.@ Polls by both professional and lay organizations have shown that approximately ten per cent of all North Americans believe they have seen UFOs. Given the population data available, this implies a very large number of UFO reports. If UFOs are trivial and non-existent, as some claim, then one might ask why such a large percentage of the population is labouring under the delusion of seeing things that are A not there.@ If, on the other hand, UFOs represent a A real@ phenomenon, the data should be examined for insight into its nature. In either situation, it can be argued that UFO reports deserve and merit serious scientific attention.

In general, the public equates UFOs with alien visitation. However, there is no incontrovertible proof that this is a real connection. In order to determine if there might be signs of extraterrestrial contact, research on the actual characteristics of UFO reports is needed. Do the reports really bear out such a linkage? What, exactly, are people seeing and reporting as UFOs? Are they seeing A classic@ Hollywood-style flying saucers, like those portrayed in movies and television shows? Are there really well-documented and well-witnessed UFO reports, with no explanation as to their nature? Given the general public perception that aliens exist and are present in our Solar System, and that the answers to these questions may already exist in the beliefs and desires of popular culture, a thorough examination of actual UFO reports would go far to provide necessary insight into the phenomenon.

What is generally overlooked by most writers and readers on this subject is that UFO reports are the foundation of ufology (the study of the UFO phenomenon). While this may seem an obvious fact, many books on UFOs and related subjects proceed on the basis of

assumptions, theories and individual anecdotal accounts. Many books about UFO abductions on bookstore shelves give the impression that this aspect of the UFO phenomenon constitutes most of ufology. This is certainly not the case; UFO research begins with the investigation of UFO reports. It is through later collection and study that researchers can theorise about the phenomenon and eventually write papers and books speculating about UFO origins (including the possible evidence of alien contact.) Abduction cases actually comprise a very tiny fraction of the bulk of UFO data. The bread and butter of UFO research lies not in fanciful discourses about aliens= genetic manipulation of humans but in what UFO witnesses are actually seeing and reporting.

This last point cannot be overemphasized. The UFO reports collected and analysed in our annual Surveys are the only data upon which studies of Canadian UFOs can be reasonably based. As UFOs are a worldwide phenomenon, the results of analyses of Canadian UFO reports can easily be applied to cases in other countries. In effect, this is the empirical data for research in this field. If one wants to know what people really are seeing in the skies, the answer lies within these reports.

### **The General Collection of UFO Data**

Many individuals, associations, clubs and groups claim to investigate UFO reports. Many solicit reports from the general public. Comparatively few actually participate in any kind of information sharing or data gathering for scientific programs. Some are primarily interest groups based in museums, planetariums, church basements or individuals= homes, and do essentially *nothing* with the sighting reports they receive. Because there is no way to enforce standards in UFO report investigations, the quality of case investigations varies considerably between groups and across provinces. Quantitative studies are difficult because subjective evaluations and differences in investigative techniques do not allow precise comparisons. UFOROM= s requests for data from Canadian UFO researchers and investigators include only basic information that can be used in rigorous analyses. This includes things such as date of the sighting, the time, duration, number of witnesses and their location C facts which are not subjective and can be used in scientific studies before interpretation.

### **The Official Collection of UFO Data**

Until 1995, the National Research Council of Canada (NRC) routinely collected UFO reports from private citizens, RCMP, civic police and military personnel. This collection of data was in support of the NRC= s interest in the retrieval of meteorites, with the idea that witnesses= reports of bright lights in the sky were mostly fireballs and meteors which could

then be triangulated to locate fallen meteorites. (In fact, the Innisfree meteorite was found in Alberta through this system.)

This practice ceased as a result of budgetary restrictions, lowered prioritization of meteoric research and the perceived reduction in importance of UFO data. However, included among the NRC reports were many observations of meteors and fireballs, and these have been added into the UFOROM database since 1989. For several years, the collection of such reports was in an effective hiatus, but in 2000, an arrangement facilitated that UFO sightings reported to Transport Canada could then be referred to UFOROM for research into the phenomenon. This does not mean that UFOROM receives all official government or military UFO reports. UFO sightings reported to the RCMP, for example, will normally get sent only to RCMP Divisional Headquarters.

Another reason why UFO data should be collected and studied is found in official directives of the Department of National Defence regarding the actions of all pilots in Canadian airspace. In documents relating to CIRVIS (Communications Instructions for Reporting Vital Intelligence Sightings), both civilians and military personnel are instructed that:

*CIRVIS reports should be made immediately upon a vital intelligence sighting of any airborne, waterborne and ground objects or activities which appear to be hostile, suspicious, unidentified or engaged in illegal smuggling activity.*

*Examples of events requiring CIRVIS reports are:*

- unidentified flying objects;*
- submarines or warships which are not Canadian or American;*
- violent explosions; and*
- unexplained or unusual activity in Polar regions, abandoned airstrips or other remote, sparsely populated areas.*

***[DND Flight Information Publication - GPH 204. Flight Planning and Procedures, Canada and North Atlantic, Issue No. 57, Effective 0901Z 20 May 1999]***

In other words, it is considered in the best interests of everyone to report UFO sightings, and certainly of interest to the Department of National Defence. The annual Canadian UFO Survey looks critically at UFO sightings and assesses their nature.

For the purposes of this and other scientific studies of UFO data, UFO sightings which have been made to recognized contributing and participating groups, associations, organizations or individuals (for a list of contributors see page 2 of this report) are considered *officially* reported and valid as data in this study. The collection of Canadian

UFO data is challenging. However, the data obtained for analysis yields results that can be compared with other studies. This is useful in understanding the nature of UFO reports not only in Canada, but can shed light on the nature of UFO reports elsewhere in the world.

### **UFO Reports in Canada**

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             |
| 1998 | 194             | 2320             |
| 1999 | 259             | 2579             |
| 2000 | 263             | 2842             |
| 2001 | 374             | 3216             |

|      |     |      |
|------|-----|------|
| 2002 | 483 | 3699 |
| 2003 | 673 | 4372 |

The number of UFO reports per year has varied annually, depending on a number of factors. However, yearly totals have generally been slowly but steadily increasing since 1989. The year 2003 saw a 39 per cent increase in UFO report numbers over 2002. Remarkably, between 1998 and 2003, there has been an almost 350 per cent increase in the number of UFO reports. This clearly contradicts comments by those who would assert that UFOs are a passing fad or that the number of UFO sightings is decreasing. In fact, since media coverage of UFOs has been decreased in recent years, it is more striking that without media stimuli, UFO sightings are being reported in greater numbers.

Still, we must recognize that yearly figures are greatly dependent on many factors, especially the cooperation of contributors to the annual survey. The large number of UFO reports in 1993 was almost entirely due to a single major fireball event which spawned reports by hundreds of independent observers across the country. Similarly, the dramatic increase in UFO reports for 2003 is partly due to a single major event on July 28, 2003, in the Okanagan Valley, in which literally hundreds of people observed and reported seeing a band of white light arching across the sky. This spectacular sight was certainly not a fireball but may still eventually have a conventional explanation. There is no question that something was seen, due to the large number of witnesses reporting it over a very wide area. Nevertheless, the 2003 data represents the largest number of UFO reports ever recorded in a single year in the 15-year history of the annual Canadian UFO Survey.

### **UFOs and IFOs**

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

Studies of UFO data routinely include reports of meteors, fireballs and other conventional objects. In many instances, observers fail to recognize stars, aircraft and bolides, and therefore report them as UFOs. Witnesses often report watching stationary flashing lights low on the horizon for hours and never conclude they are observing a star or planet.

Some UFO investigators spend many hours sorting IFOs from UFOs. Historically, analyses of UFO data such as the American projects Grudge, Sign and Blue Book all included raw UFO data which later were resolved into categories of UFOs and IFOs. Sometimes,

observed objects are quickly assigned a particular IFO explanation even though later investigation suggests such an explanation was unwarranted. The reverse is also true.

The issue of including IFOs in studies of 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 useful. 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 C definitely part of the UFO report legacy.

IFOs are problematic in that they are not interesting to most ufologists. In fact, some UFO investigators readily admit they do not record details about UFO reports that seem easily explained as ordinary objects. This may be a serious error. The UFO witness may be conscientiously reporting an object that is mysterious to him or her C the exact definition of a UFO. Therefore, even late-night, anonymous telephone calls that are obviously reports of airplanes or planets should be rightly logged as UFO reports. It seems reasonable that all UFO reports be included in statistical databases and in later studies on the phenomenon, regardless of the cases= later reclassification as IFOs.

The IFO question became more significant in 2003 as many more fireball and meteor reports than usual were added as data from astronomical sources. Brilliant fireballs have always been included within UFO data, especially the American military studies, and have been included in the UFOROM annual studies as a matter of course and to allow better comparisons with historical studies. As fireball reporting networks become more efficient, however, the number of IFOs in the UFO database increases dramatically. Many fireballs are reported as UFOs and are thus justifiably included in the UFO database. Others that are reported as fireballs and bolides might not be considered appropriate for inclusion, and this problem should be addressed in later analyses.

Since most UFO reports can be explained and reclassified as IFOs, this fact 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 that was not just a fantasy of a witness= imagination.

## **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 Excel database and statistically analysed.

An example of the coding key is as follows:

Example: 2003 01 09 1530 Vernon BC DD 900 silver 2 ps 6 5 UFOBC p four objs. seen

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

Field 1 is a default YEAR for the report.

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 Modified Hynek Classification System.

Field 8 is the DURATION of the sighting, in seconds (a value of 600 thus represents 10 minutes).

Field 9 is the primary COLOUR of the object(s) seen

Field 10 is the number of WITNESSES

Field 11 is the SHAPE of the object(s) seen

Field 12 is the STRANGENESS of the report.

Field 13 is the RELIABILITY of the report.

Field 14 is the SOURCE of the report.

Field 15 is the EVALUATION of the case.

Field 16 includes any COMMENTS noted about the case.

## **Analyses of the Data**

### **Distribution of UFO Reports Across Canada**

In 2003, British Columbia had more than 45 per cent of the total number of UFO sightings reported in Canada, a substantial over-representation based on population alone. Ontario and Quebec together constitute more than 60 per cent of Canada's population, but had less than 30 per cent of the total number of UFO reports in 2003. Only 31 cases were reported east of Quebec in 2003. In 2003, the numbers of UFO reports in BC, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec were the highest ever recorded.

**TABLE 1****Distribution of UFO Reports by Province**

|      | BC  | AB | SK | MB | ON  | PQ | NB | PEI | NS | NF | YK | NT | NU |
|------|-----|----|----|----|-----|----|----|-----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 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 |    |
| 1998 | 58  | 6  | 14 | 15 | 59  | 15 | 1  | 1   | -  | -  | 22 | 2  |    |
| 1999 | 118 | 19 | 1  | 6  | 79  | 8  | 1  | 1   | 0  | 6  | 20 | 0  |    |
| 2000 | 102 | 17 | 8  | 19 | 53  | 22 | 0  | 0   | 15 | 0  | 26 | 0  |    |
| 2001 | 123 | 40 | 12 | 20 | 87  | 34 | 5  | 2   | 21 | 6  | 18 | 1  | 5  |
| 2002 | 176 | 51 | 6  | 36 | 128 | 34 | 4  | 0   | 23 | 3  | 20 | 0  | 2  |
| 2003 | 304 | 76 | 19 | 25 | 150 | 49 | 4  | 2   | 21 | 4  | 16 | 2  | 1  |

In addition, the geographical names of UFO sighting locations were examined for trends. Many cities were found to have multiple reports, and these are noted in the following table. Large metropolitan areas include their suburbs.

In 2003, Vancouver (including Surrey, North Vancouver, etc.) was cited as a location where UFOs were most frequently observed. Metro Toronto held this honour in 2002, but was second in 2003. Two small towns in northern British Columbia appeared on the list as third and fourth. Making the top ten list for the first time were Airdrie (Alberta) and Kelowna (BC). Calgary and Edmonton= s traditional rivalry persists in both cities making the list. Kimberly, Vernon and Winnipeg also had significant numbers of UFO reports.

#### **Canadian Cities With the Most UFO Reports in 2003**

| Rank in 2003 | Rank in 2002 | City      | Province | Number of Reports |
|--------------|--------------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 1            | 2            | Vancouver | BC       | 41                |
| 2            | 1            | Toronto   | ON       | 34                |
| 3            | 4            | Houston   | BC       | 33                |
| 4            | 3            | Terrace   | BC       | 30                |
| 5            |              | Airdrie   | AB       | 17                |
| 6            |              | Kelowna   | BC       | 16                |
| 7            | 9            | Calgary   | AB       | 15                |

|         |   |          |    |    |
|---------|---|----------|----|----|
| 8       | 6 | Edmonton | AB | 14 |
| 9 (tie) | 5 | Winnipeg | MB | 13 |
| 9 (tie) |   | Kimberly | BC | 13 |
| 9 (tie) |   | Vernon   | BC | 13 |

### Monthly Trends in UFO Reports

Monthly breakdowns of reports during each year tend to show slightly different patterns. For example, in 1999, UFO cases had no clear peaks in monthly report numbers, but the year 2000 saw a very significant set of peaks in August and October and troughs in May and June. UFO reports are generally thought 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 2003, a very unusual monthly variation was found. With the exception of a large peak in July/August and a lesser one in October, there was almost a constant level of UFO activity reported throughout the year. The yearly trough in May/June was slightly evident. This is counter-intuitive to the belief that more UFOs are seen when there are more people outside during warmer periods of the year.

**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 |
| 1998 | 3  | 4  | 8  | 5  | 9  | 13 | 16  | 40  | 45 | 35  | 7  | 4  |
| 1999 | 8  | 20 | 22 | 7  | 31 | 10 | 27  | 36  | 30 | 29  | 30 | 7  |
| 2000 | 21 | 17 | 15 | 21 | 12 | 11 | 19  | 46  | 20 | 44  | 15 | 19 |
| 2001 | 36 | 19 | 33 | 25 | 17 | 26 | 51  | 81  | 25 | 17  | 27 | 16 |
| 2002 | 31 | 54 | 41 | 28 | 36 | 44 | 73  | 74  | 42 | 26  | 19 | 14 |
| 2003 | 41 | 46 | 46 | 46 | 31 | 30 | 131 | 102 | 46 | 64  | 43 | 47 |

### 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 some variations. Nocturnal Lights (NLs), increased 51 per cent in 2002 to 64 per cent in 2003. Daylight Disc reports decreased from 15.8 per cent in 2002 to 11 per cent in 2003. In general, more UFOs in 2003 were simply lights seen in the night sky. Nearly 87 per cent of all UFO sightings in 2003, including both NL and Nocturnal Disc (ND) cases, occurred at night.

Less than 3 per cent of all reported UFO cases in 2003 were Close Encounters. Very, very few UFO cases involve anything other than distant objects seen in the sky. This is an important statistic, because the current popular interest in abductions and sensational UFO encounters is based not on the vast majority of UFO cases but on the very tiny fraction of cases which fall into the category of close encounters. The endless speculation of what aliens may or may not be doing in our airspace seems almost completely unconnected to what are actually being reported as UFOs.

**TABLE 3**

**Report Types (Modified Hynek Classifications)**

|         | NL  | ND | DD | C1 | C2 | C3 | C4 |
|---------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 1989    | 84  | 20 | 16 | 10 | 7  | -  | 2  |
| 1990    | 141 | 24 | 15 | 2  | 1  | -  | 4  |
| 1991    | 110 | 26 | 13 | 7  | 4  | 1  | 2  |
| 1992    | 136 | 44 | 20 | 15 | 5  | 2  | 3  |
| 1993    | 372 | 77 | 26 | 8  | 2  | 1  | 1  |
| 1994-95 | 234 | 78 | 28 | 21 | 1  | 1  | 5  |
| 1996    | 170 | 40 | 27 | 8  | 3  | 4  | 1  |
| 1997    | 145 | 62 | 52 | 4  | 2  | 5  | 8  |
| 1998    | 115 | 23 | 25 | 6  | 1  | -  | -  |
| 1999    | 163 | 44 | 37 | 3  | 7  | 1  | -  |
| 2000    | 179 | 31 | 26 | 4  | 2  | 2  | -  |

|      |     |     |    |   |   |   |   |
|------|-----|-----|----|---|---|---|---|
| 2001 | 218 | 80  | 55 | 8 | 1 | 3 | 3 |
| 2002 | 293 | 94  | 76 | 8 | 5 | 0 | 1 |
| 2003 | 431 | 152 | 74 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 2 |

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

Note: The category of **Nocturnal Disc** was created in the 1980s by UFOROM originally for differentiation of cases within its own report files.

### Hourly Distribution

The hourly distribution of cases has usually followed a similar pattern every year, with a peak at 2200 hours local and a trough around 1000 hours local. In 2002, there was an unexpected slight shift in the peak from 2200 to 2300 hours, and a shift in the trough from 1000 to noon. In 2003, the peak is again at 2300 hours, but the trough has shifted earlier than before, to 0900.

Since most UFOs are nocturnal lights, most sightings will occur during the evening hours. Since the number of possible observers drops off sharply near midnight, we would expect the hourly rate of UFO reports would vary with two factors: potential observers and darkness.

### Duration

The category of **Duration** is interesting in that it represents the *subjective* length of time the UFO experience lasted. In other words, this is the length of time the sighting lasted *as estimated by the witness*. Naturally, these times are greatly suspect because it is known

that people tend to badly misjudge the flow of time. However, *some* people can be good at estimating time, so this value has some importance. Although an estimate of "one hour" may be in error by several minutes, it is unlikely that the true duration would be, for example, one *minute*. Furthermore, there have been cases when a UFO was observed and clocked very 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 sum of all given durations divided by the number of cases with a stated duration. This value has varied somewhat, from seven minutes in 1994 to 25 minutes in 1996. In 2002, the average duration of all cases was 920 seconds, or about 15 minutes, but this duration fell significantly in 2003 to 613 seconds, or about 10 minutes. This drop is probably due to the increase in very short duration meteor/fireball reports.

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 these observations are of astronomical objects, moving slowly with the rotation of the Earth.

The duration of a sighting is one of the biggest clues to its explanation. Experience in studying UFO reports has shown us that short duration events are usually fireballs or bolides, and 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. One study by an Ontario UFO group which timed aircraft observations found that the duration of such sightings varied between 15 seconds to more than eight minutes. Therefore, sightings with durations in this range could very well be aircraft, providing other observational data do not contradict such an explanation.

## **Colour**

In cases where a colour of an object was reported by witnesses, the most common colour in 2003 was white (37 per cent). The next most common colour was A multicoloured,@ with 13 per cent of the total. Next in order were orange, green and red. This is somewhat different from 2002 in that red was much more common last year. Since most UFOs are nocturnal starlike objects, the abundance of white objects is not surprising. Colours such as red, orange, blue and green often are associated with bolides (fireballs).

The A multicoloured@ designation is problematic in that it literally covers a wide range of possibilities. Some studies of UFO data have partitioned the category of **Colour** to include both A primary@ and A 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. (Many of these are certainly stars or planets, which flash a variety of colours when seen low on the horizon. Aircraft also frequently are described as having more than one colour of light.) For our study, the **Colour** classification refers only to the primary colour in the witness= description.

### **Witnesses**

The average number of witnesses per case between 1989 and 2002 is approximately 2.00. This value has fluctuated between a high of 2.4 in 1996 to as low as 1.4 in 1990. In 2003, the average number of witnesses per case was 2.04.

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

### **Shape**

Witnesses= descriptions of the shapes of UFOs vary greatly. In 2003, almost 40 per cent were of A point sources@ C that is, A starlike@ objects. The next most common shapes were A fireball,@ with 26 per cent and A triangle@ at five per cent. The classic A flying saucer@ or disc-shaped object comprised only slightly more than three per cent of all UFO reports, contrary to popular opinion.

The shape of a perceived object depends on many factors such as the witness= own visual acuity, the angle of viewing, the distance of viewing and the witness= own biases and descriptive abilities. Nevertheless, in combination with other case data such as duration, shape can be a good clue towards a UFO= s possible explanation.

### **Strangeness**

The assigning of a **Strangeness** rating to a UFO report is based on a classification adopted by researchers who noted 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 UFO reports during 2003 was 3.6, unchanged from 2002, where 1 is considered not strange at all and 9 is considered exceptionally unusual. Therefore, most UFOs reported are of objects which do not greatly stretch the imagination. Hollywood-style flying saucers are, in reality, relatively uncommon in UFO reports.

### **Reliability**

The average **Reliability** rating of Canadian UFO reports in 2003 was 5.39, similar to 2002, indicating that there were approximately 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 data or description of the object(s) observed. Higher reliability cases might include actual interviews with witnesses, a detailed case investigation, multiple witnesses, supporting documentation and other evidence.

**Reliability** and **Strangeness** ratings tend to vary in classic bell-shaped curves. In other words, there are very few cases which were both highly unusual and well-reported. Most cases are of medium strangeness and medium reliability. These are the A high-quality unknowns@ which will be discussed in a later section of this study. However, there are also very few low-strangeness cases with low reliability. Low-strangeness cases, therefore, tend to be well-reported and probably have explanations.

### **Sources**

UFO data used in this study were supplied by many different groups, organizations, official agencies and private individuals. Since this annual survey began in the late 1980s, more and more cases have been obtained and received via the Internet.

In 2002, about 32 per cent of the total cases were obtained through the private and non-profit National UFO Reporting Center in the USA, which has a toll-free telephone number for reporting UFOs and a large sightings list created through voluntary submission of online report forms by witnesses. This contribution dropped to 19 per cent in 2003. About seven per cent of the 2003 cases came from UFO\*BC (a significant drop from about 67 per cent in 2001), which also has a toll-free number and a significant public presence in its province. One can speculate that if there were a well-advertised toll-free number and accompanying website for reporting UFOs in each Canadian province, perhaps yearly report numbers would increase dramatically. The Houston BC Centre for UFOs (HBCCUFO) had the lion's share of contributions, with 38 per cent, and it, too, has a toll-free number for reporting

UFOs across Canada. The Meteor and Impacts Advisory Committee to the Canadian Space Agency (MIAC) was the source for more than 16 per cent of all fireball reports.

A little less than four per cent of the cases in 2003 came as a result of information obtained through Transport Canada and the Department of National Defence.

### **Evaluation (Explanations)**

The breakdown by **Evaluation** for 2003 cases was similar to results from previous years. There were four operative categories: **Explained, Insufficient Information, Possible or Probable Explanation**, and **Unknown (or Unexplained)**. It is important to note 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 solely on the given data (though the probability of this scenario is technically never zero).

In most cases, an Evaluation is made subjectively by both the contributing investigators and the compilers of this study. 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. Cases are also re-evaluated periodically as additional data or information is brought to attention or obtained through further investigation.

Since 1989, the average proportion of **Unknowns** has been about 13 per cent per year. In 2003, this was about 17 per cent. This is a relatively high figure, implying that almost one in six 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 and rigorous standards for UFO investigation. Investigators who are believers@ might be inclined 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. At first, contributors tended to ignore UFO sightings that had a simple explanation and deleted them as actual UFO data. Hence, the only UFO reports submitted by contributors tended to be high-strangeness cases. Contributors were then encouraged to submit data on all UFO reports they received, so that a more uniform assessment and evaluation process could be realized. Because many IFO cases such as fireballs and meteors are initially reported as UFOs, the **Explained** category was considered necessary for a full review of UFO data. As noted previously, 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.

The process of evaluating UFO sightings is often complex, involving a series of steps that take into account errors of observation and unpredictable but natural phenomena. Checks with star charts, police, air traffic control operators and meteorologists are often performed. Where possible, witnesses are interviewed in person, and sketches or photographs of the area may be examined. The intent is to eliminate as many conventional explanations as possible before allowing an evaluation or conclusion.

**TABLE 4**

**Evaluation of Canadian UFO Data**

|         | Explained |          | Insuf. Info. |          | Poss. Explan. |          | Unexplained |          |
|---------|-----------|----------|--------------|----------|---------------|----------|-------------|----------|
|         | #         | per cent | #            | per cent | #             | per cent | #           | per cent |
| 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     |
| 1994-95 | 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     |

|       |     |      |      |      |      |      |     |      |
|-------|-----|------|------|------|------|------|-----|------|
| 1998  | 10  | 5.1  | 75   | 38.7 | 87   | 44.8 | 22  | 11.3 |
| 1999  | 10  | 3.9  | 82   | 31.5 | 135  | 51.9 | 32  | 12.3 |
| 2000  | 22  | 8.5  | 94   | 36.4 | 108  | 41.9 | 34  | 13.2 |
| 2001  | 22  | 5.9  | 130  | 34.7 | 165  | 44.1 | 57  | 15.2 |
| 2002  | 12  | 2.5  | 192  | 39.7 | 192  | 39.7 | 87  | 18   |
| 2003  | 110 | 16.3 | 166  | 24.7 | 286  | 42.5 | 111 | 16.5 |
| Total | 471 | 10.7 | 1571 | 35.9 | 1296 | 29.6 | 629 | 14.4 |

There were 111 **Unknowns** out of 673 total cases in 2003. If we look only at the **Unknowns** with a **Reliability** rating of 7 or greater, we are left with 28 high-quality **Unknowns** in 2003 (about four per cent of the total). This is in agreement with previous studies. As a comparison, USAF Blue Book studies found three to four per cent 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.

### **Summary of Results**

As with previous studies, the *2003 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 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 mysterious 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 higher-quality unknowns among the mass of 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.

The interpretation of the 111 Unknowns is that these cases were among the most challenging of all the reports received in 2003. 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 list of Unknowns. And, above all, these cases are *not* proof of extraterrestrial visitation.

### **Other comments**

Since 1989, rate of UFO reporting in Canada has been an average of 20 cases per month, although this has been increasing during the past five years. In 2002, the monthly rate was 40 per month, or at least one UFO sighting each day somewhere in Canada. The rate jumped significantly again in 2003, to more than 50 sightings per month.

The increase in the numbers of UFO reports with time likely does not have a simple explanation. It could be related to a growing awareness within the general population that there are agencies which collect UFO reports. It could be that there really are more UFOs

physically present in the sky. It could be that the collection of UFO data is becoming more efficient. While media have been noted as playing a definite role in UFO waves (a national increase in UFO sightings), media coverage of UFO reports has significantly declined over the past decade while the number of reports has risen. Perhaps a cultural factor is at work as well, where A aliens@ and UFOs are now well-entrenched within the societal mindset and are accepted as more probable than fiction. This question by itself is deserving of scientific study.

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.

### **Contributing Organizations**

AUFOSG (Alberta UFO Study Group)

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National UFO Reporting Center

<http://www.ufocenter.com>

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UFO Nova Scotia

<http://www.donledger.com>

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MUFON Ontario

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HBCC UFO Research

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Newfoundland UFOs

e-mail: [nfufos@hotmail.com](mailto:nfufos@hotmail.com) (Jen H.)

UFO Yukon Research Society

<http://www.ufobc.ca/yukon/index.html>

e-mail: [mjjasek@shaw.ca](mailto:mjjasek@shaw.ca) (Martin Jasek)

Transport Canada

Department of National Defence

Royal Canadian Mounted Police

### **Most Interesting Canadian > Unknowns= in 2003**

**The following are those Canadian UFO reports in 2003 which had a Reliability Rating of 7 or greater, a Strangeness Rating of 6 or greater and which were also assigned an Evaluation of Unknown.**

#### **January 31, 2003 10:30 pm Villeneuve, AB**

Two witnesses watched a large, white object, described as A two saucers rim to rim, @ move slowly through a farm yard and over some houses, then out of sight.

#### **February 12, 2003 9:02 pm Vancouver, BC**

A dark triangular craft with some sort of structured undercarriage was seen to fly silently over the city. It was in view for three minutes by two witnesses.

#### **February 19, 2003 9:20 am Raymore, SK**

A fast-moving silvery object, A like a cruise missile,@ flew swiftly across snow-covered fields east of Regina, heading north.

**March 3, 2003 7:55 am Houston, BC**

The driver and passenger of a truck travelling along a highway watched as a silver object the size and shape of A an Airstream trailer@ flew alongside them, then zoomed away.

**April 21, 2003 11:45 pm Houston, BC**

Two people watched an unusual black object with several rows of lights on its surface swept back in a A V@ shape as it flew silently west to east.

**July 7, 2003 10:30 pm Verdun, PQ**

A witness watched a gray, teardrop-shaped object moving slowly at low altitude over rooftops, making an unusual whirring sound.

**July 31, 2003 1:00 am Glenmore, BC**

Eight people saw some unusual, green nocturnal lights moving in the sky. Shortly thereafter, two of the witnesses began having odd dreams and panic attacks, and believed they had periods of A missing time,@ suggestive of alien abduction.

**August 6, 2003 12:32 am North Bay, ON**

Three witnesses watched as a gray, cigar-shaped object, stationary in the sky, became A wavy@ and then suddenly disappeared from view after five minutes.

**August 10, 2003 2:22 pm Whitehorse, YK**

A large fuselage-shaped object flew low along a road, under some guy wires, and among trees.

**August 23, 2003 6:45 pm Winnipeg, MB**

A saucer-shaped object with A protrusions@ was observed by three witnesses for 30 seconds as it flew over some cars on a highway.

**September 21, 2003 Whitehorse, YK**

A triangular object with red lights flew over a pair of witnesses.

**December 8, 2003 8:45 pm Houston, BC**

An unusual white, oval object with a ring of blue lights hovered overtop a house, dropping sparks, then flew steadily towards the mountains and was lost to sight.

## **December 24, 2003 1:00 pm Airdrie, AB**

Three people watched a chrome-coloured A marble@ hanging motionless in the sky. After about 15 seconds, it vanished without a trace.

## **A note about the A Okanagan Arch@**

On July 28, 2003, two very unusual objects were observed in the night sky by literally hundreds of witnesses in southern British Columbia, many of them in the Okanagan Valley.

First, at approximately 12:45 am, a A moon-sized@ object was seen flying over the region. The object traveled from the northwest to the southeast, changing direction in some cases to move over local mountains, and dropping into valleys. When it did this the object traveled briefly to the west then made its turn back on course to the southeast. The object was reported by all witnesses as being A as large as a full moon@ and extremely bright white in colour. Its movement was described by several witnesses as a A zig-zag.@ No sound was associated with the object. The weather conditions were clear, as it was a star-filled night.

Shortly thereafter, a beam of light appeared overhead, arching across the sky at about 1:00 am and persisting until at least 2:00 am. The beam or ray of white light was observed from Kamloops to as far south and east as Jaffray, British Columbia. People who watched the strange and puzzling event said the white light looked A as bright as a fluorescent tube@ and said it was arced from horizon to horizon as if one was viewing a rainbow. The beam of light sat almost stationary in this position for approximately an hour before dissipating. Almost everyone who witnessed the beam of white light said they had never seen anything like this before. All said they had watched the northern lights many times, but they insisted this was certainly not the aurora.

The fact that hundreds of witnesses reported the two events is testament that something physically real was observed. In some cases, both objects were reported by the same observers.

The possibility of an astronomical cause was first considered, but this does not seem a viable explanation. If the arch was a meteor train, its hour-long persistence would be highly unlikely, especially one as bright as reported. As it turns out, there was a bright bolide reported near Omak, Washington, at 12:27 am on July 28, 2003, fragmenting as it flew in the northwest sky. It lasted for two seconds. Although its location and direction would place it in the right area, it is very odd that none of the hundreds of witnesses of the arch reported seeing such a bright fireball.

Another factor that could be involved in the arch is the fire situation in the BC interior about that time. Forest fires ravaged much of the Okanagan Valley during the summer, especially where the arch was seen. This seems more than a coincidence. It is quite possible that the first object could have been, perhaps, a water bomber or a related fire fighting aircraft. As for the arch itself, one can speculate that light from the fires reflected off their own clouds of smoke. One problem with this suggestion is that witnesses of the arch described it as brilliant white, whereas reflected fire light would likely be more red or orange in colour.

An astronomer at Penticton Observatory was asked to comment on the arch, and he noted:

My recollection is that the fires had started before then so their effects are certainly something to consider. On the other hand, this summer I became aware of a phenomenon known as the 'Okanagan Arch', a whitish band which crosses the sky, similar in form to an aurora but not an aurora colour, persists for hours, is seen in the Okanagan from time to time, and nobody knows what it is, in particular nobody at the observatory. One of these was reported in mid-August, and the descriptions for July 28 sound very similar.

So even astronomers were scratching their heads over this phenomenon.

Where does this leave us? A persistent aerial phenomenon that is not astronomical could therefore be atmospheric in nature. Noctilucent clouds, perhaps? But why suddenly, for an entire hour, so geometrically perfect and so long after sunset?

Earthquake lights? Yet the description does not match most EQL reports. Further, the arch did not precede or follow any significant seismic activity in the region. There was a minor 3.2 M earthquake on August 12, 59 km west of Kelowna, but it would be difficult to connect such a low-energy event with such a phenomenal aerial display, especially since stronger events in the same area did not generate such arches. For example, a much stronger 4.6 M earthquake in Wyoming on August 21 has not been associated with any luminous aerial displays.

Unfortunately, we are left with many reports of a well-witnessed luminous aerial phenomenon with no explanation.