

Episode 49: Waiting Room Loach  
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Checking for creatures under your bed is a balancing act. Do it too much and the practice begins to haunt you. Never do it and you might miss something worth seeing.

Welcome to The CryptoNaturalist.

[Theme Music]

I doubt it will surprise you to hear that not all land animals stick to the land. (I know I don't.) And, of course, not all aquatic animals stick to the water.

It's true of more commonplace nature. From mudskippers to garden variety mermaids. It's also true of cryptonature.

Let's take pines for example.

Most species of pine live their whole lives on the land, in plain view, but end life in a peculiar way.

You might think that other than the whispered rumors of homesick raindrops, pines wouldn't have much to do with the ocean.

And yet...

When a pine nears the end of its lifecycle, it breaks free of the ground in a slow pirouette and floats by night to the sea. It seeks out the deep waters, transforming on the ocean floor into a shaggy, luminescent tower of waving boughs, waltzing on the sand, orbited by sea life.

In person, it looks a bit like a cross between a Christmas tree and an exceptionally large jellyfish.

Which is fitting both in terms of its festive glow and its potent venom.

Now, certainly this doesn't apply to all pines and it almost never happens if someone is actively watching, but my point stands.

Life on this planet originated in the seas. How fitting that it should return there.

There is endless traffic between the water and the land.  
Today's creature is another fine example of this phenomenon.

The waiting room loach.

Part fish. Part pickpocket. Entirely a master of stealth.

Indeed, from dentists to veterinarians, if the waiting room has an aquarium, chances are good that you are sharing your space and listening to soft, inoffensive music with a waiting room loach.

Cassandra and I spent the day in the Wegman's parking lot, near route 290 just north of Buffalo, New York. From there, I had an easy walk to Dr. Chad Cryder's Chiropractic Center and Haberdashery.

The place was located in a pleasantly haunted strip mall, sandwiched between the ancient husks of a RadioShack and a Blockbuster Video. Dark and skeletal like retail whale falls.

A hand-painted sign featuring a vertebrae with a dapper bowler hat told me I was in the right place.

An electronic chime welcomed me in.

The place smelled like hand sanitizer and the forced confidence of people trying to convince themselves that they could probably pull off a fedora.

To my right, a showroom featuring a hundred or so behatted mannequin heads, all of them positioned to stare at newcomers.

One of the more menacing product displays I've witnessed of late.

To my left, a waiting room.

Beige carpet. Gray chairs. A four foot aquarium dominated by a plastic flying saucer crash-landed in a forest of plastic plants.

End tables with shifting tectonic plates of magazines declaring, “yes, people still print magazines, stop looking so incredulous.”

Someone in grass green scrubs raised an eyebrow at me through a check-in window.

“Waiting for a friend,” I said.

They nodded.

It’s amazing how often that explanation satisfies.

I sat against the back wall, opposite the only other patron. A woman who looked to be 90 or so. Between her segmented, puffy black coat and her oversized amber sunglasses, she looked like the venerated old ruler of some insectile nation of humanoid beetles.

Perhaps she was. I didn’t ask.

I brought a satchel with me, brimming with tubes of Chapstick and half-eaten granola bars.

Bait.

I sat it in the chair next to me and settled in to wait.

I never mind waiting.

Waiting is the doorway to many pleasant things. Anticipation. Suspense. Satisfaction. And good ol’ daydreaming.

Quiet moments are often the garden where imagination blooms.

Speaking of blooming imagination, how about a little poetry?

It's time for today's hidden lore segment.

Today's hidden lore is a poem by Mia Cong.

Coelacanth

It is important to recall the scale of the Coelacanth

Her evolutionary alterations and cellular increments,  
clothed in her genes and steeped in eons of daughters uncountable.

And yet, all concealed, under what eyes describe as "living fossil",  
under ossified limb configuration left stagnant in its own antiquity.

So remember her, and seek comfort in your improvements,  
even if nothing hints to such on the outside.

For you owe no one the proof of your progress.

I like that last line. "You owe no one the proof of your progress." I think that's a sentiment worthy of becoming a daily affirmation. Thanks to Mia and thanks to inspirational coelacanth everywhere.

Mia is an aspiring chef, occasional poet, and current scribe working under the handle theshitpostcalligrapher across all platforms. Still looking through the urban wilds of Toronto Canada for a kitchen to call home, you can find her writings and love of the deep ocean and decay at genericpoetryblog on tumblr.

Ya know, in some ways, the waiting room loach is one of the more humble creatures I've spoken about.

It doesn't appear with a sonic boom like the Orbital Kingfisher.  
It doesn't dominate the mood of a landscape like The Quiet Folk.

It's a subtle creature with relatively simple needs.

But, what of that?

Does any part of you believe that the awe inspiring presence of a great blue whale is more noble than the silent resiliency of moss?

Is the ineffable history compressed into a single dandelion bloom to be judged based on size or sound?

No, indeed.

So, while I wasn't tossed from my chair by the passage of the loach, I felt the boom and thunder of its small and hidden life reverberating down in my core.

It's hard to say what the true form of the waiting room loach resembles.

I'm not sure it has a true form.

I imagine, uncamouflaged, it resembles a kuhli loach. A common aquarium fish. Narrow and slender. Scaleless. Like a small eel, though with more of the barbeled face of catfish.

The waiting room loach is larger than a kuhli loach. About the dimensions of a cigar, though their knack for changing shape and color makes such statements largely meaningless.

I first spotted the loach exiting the aquarium, a feat even I barely managed despite having considerable practice spotting things that ought not be spotted.

There was a ripple at the surface of the water.

A brain tickle told me something had changed.

The fake plant next to the aquarium had an extra leaf.

A rustle.

A shift in the light.

A new stapler sat on the reception window counter.

The stapler's gills flared once, then my eyes were forced away.

I regained control and looked back.

No stapler.

Something soft and cool brushed my ankle.

A narrow sunbeam on the beige carpet raised and lowered a delicate dorsal fin.

Again, I had a feeling akin to the wind shifting and blowing campfire smoke into my eyes. I looked away and back again.

No more sunbeam.

My satchel had an extra handle.

The handle drooped, then slid into the bag.

I could just hear the barely audible click of plastic lip balm tubes shifting.

The dry, crinkle of a granola bar wrapper being prodded aside.

I tilted in my seat to peer down into my bag.

There, for just a moment, I thought I saw the fish in its natural form, spotted like the sun-dappled bed of a woodland river.

Perhaps that was the fish as it really is. Perhaps the loach was only doing what it does best, matching the expectations of the observer.

An instant later, the body wriggled into an S-curve, then shot away as another odd sensation pulled my gaze elsewhere.

For a long moment, I lost it.

Then, I noticed that my fellow waiting room patron suddenly had a long, drooping mustache.

“Okay, now you’re showing off on purpose,” I said. Accidentally speaking aloud.

My elderly companion shrugged and adjusted her glasses.

“I won’t apologize for fashion, young man,” she said.

I tipped my hat.

“Nor should you.”

A blur and the mustache was gone. A moment later, a tiny splash told me the loach was back in the aquarium.

I don’t know about you, but whenever I’m in a waiting room, I get a strange sense that there is something peculiar about the space. Maybe it’s the transient nature of the place. It’s a odd, liminal bit of building design.

Then again, maybe waiting rooms feel that way because we’re being watched by an inexplicable creature that hunts in our pockets and purses.

I suppose it could be a bit of both.

Ah.

Cassandra has opened a tiny portcullis in my console here and a beautiful snail with exclamation point painted on its shell has emerged.

If I recall correctly, that is one of the many ways she lets me know that we have a new field report.

Let's take a listen.

[Click]

This is Monty Guyberry broadcasting on CryptoNaturalist frequency 11-58-1.

Look, I know a vocal minority of you listening have asked me to stop broadcasting on this channel. I hope that you can respect that I've decided to ignore you.

Secondarily, I hope you can summon the wisdom to leave ajar the door of future friendship.

There's a reason the door of future friendship is both golden and sticky.

Golden because it demands your respect. Sticky because you ought not to fiddle with it.

In reference to your requests for my silence, may I just say, "I get it."

In fairness to you lot, It's true I didn't know what the word "CryptoNaturalist" meant until after I had been calling myself one for nearly eight months.

A reasonable criticism. I'll take that on the chin.

While we're at it, It's also true I stole this broadcasting device from a locker in the Auckland central bus station.

I shan't apologize for that because sincerity still means something to me.

And... yes... I'm ready to admit that Guyberry's Unified Theory of hippos turned out to be a real misstep.

I can acknowledge now that a hippo is not, as I previously hypothesized, "what happens when a bear and a dolphin become more than friends."

My bad.



Now that all that frivolous nonsense has been put behind us, perhaps you dastardly naysayers wouldn't mind if we do a little thing called scientific discovery?

Sound good?

As a rising star among CryptoNaturalists (noun: one who studies hidden nature), it is only natural that I should discover a new cryptid.

I have done so.

Here's a bit of a teaser.

\*Ahem\*

Since the dawn of time, one thing has been clear to every human and probably some of the sharper apes:

That the skies shall be ruled by Birds and machines alone.

This has been true since the mighty thunder-lizards passed untimely from the Earth, God rest their magnificent souls.

Well, guess what? Everything we thought we knew about sky-life was wrong. What if I told you that something new has spat in the eye of gravity? Something that, unlike birds, doesn't need the power of the sun to fly?

Not an invention of man.

Not a feathered avian.

Distinguished colleagues, I give you "Guyberry's Night-Bird."

[Aside] Imagine here that I've unveiled a really impressive diagram.

A small, but fearsome creature.

Picture the leathery wings of the pterodactyl.

The sharp, ivory teeth of the Timberwolf.

The maddening snout of the domestic pug.  
The absurd proportions of a chipmunk.

Toss all that together and send it swooping through the sable skies of night and you've just made the acquaintance of my legacy.

Like a rat crossed with a gargoyle. Like if a bird was also a werewolf. Like if a dragon and a mouse became more than just friends.

Guyberry's Night-Bird.

I haven't gotten a pic yet because I dropped my iPhone into some Italian Wedding soup, but I've done some pretty okay drawings that I'll send along after this message.

Honestly, I don't know what the big deal is about discovering a new cryptid. I was in a bowling alley carpark at dusk and there were a half-dozen Night-Birds swooping about dining on moths.

Try looking up from time to time, gang.

I look forward to your apologies and your continued friendship.  
Monty Guyberry, discoverer of Guyberry's Night-Bird, signing off.  
[Click]

Hmm. I don't want to leap to any conclusions, but it sounds like he's discovered... bats.

Well, I applaud his enthusiasm and, hey, sometimes the healthiest strategy is to focus on competing with yourself, aiming for that personal best. Not every one of our achievements needs compared to the entirety of human endeavor.

Monty has just added bats to his awareness and they are a cryptid within his own personal context. Very exciting.

Strange is a very subjective term and I, for one, welcome it whenever it arrives. Do thou likewise.

Speaking of which...

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

**Show Notes: Episode 49: Waiting Room Loach (00:21:46)**

### **Credits**

**There's a strange, watchful feeling that lingers in waiting rooms. That feeling is courtesy of a strange, watchful creature.**

Special thanks to Guy Montgomery for voicing this episode's field report. Guy does stand up comedy and you can watch him do his new show "Guy Montgomery By Name, Guy Montgomery By Nature" this month at the Melbourne Comedy Festival or in May at the Sydney Comedy Festival. If you aren't going to be in Australia for those shows, check him out on Twitter @guy\_mont or on the podcast The Worst Idea of All Time, a show that started with two friends watching and reviewing the movie Grown-Ups 2 every week for a year and, if anything, has gotten stranger since then. Guy is a delight. Look him up. His website: guymontgomery.co.nz

Check out Field Guide to the Haunted Forest by Jarod K. Anderson wherever books are sold.

Reminder: Transcripts of this and every episode are available at [cryptonaturalist.com](http://cryptonaturalist.com).

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You'll find information about submitting your poetry or prose for our hidden lore segments in the about section of our website at [CryptoNaturalist.com](http://CryptoNaturalist.com).

The CryptoNaturalist is written and read by Jarod K. Anderson.

Thanks to Adam Hurt for the use of his song Garfield's Blackberry Blossom from his album Insight. For more information on Adam's music, performances, and teaching, visit [adamhurt.com](http://adamhurt.com).

**Post Script:**

I had sorta hoped that I'd catch the waiting room loach swallowing ChapStick tubes whole to account for their constant disappearance. Alas, no. That remains a mystery.