

= Water bull =

The water bull , also known as tarbh uisge in Scottish Gaelic , is a mythological Scottish creature similar to the Manx tarroo ushtey . Generally regarded as a nocturnal resident of moorland lochs , it is usually more amiable than its equine counterpart the water horse , but has similar amphibious and shapeshifting abilities .

The water bull is said to reproduce with standard cattle , the resulting progeny distinguishable by the small size of their ears . According to some myths , the calves of water bulls and ordinary cows ought to be killed at birth by any method other than drowning ? they cannot be killed by drowning ? to avoid bringing disaster to the herd . Conversely , in northern areas the calves are considered to be of superior quality .

= = Etymology = =

Lexicographer Edward Dwelly translates tarbh uisge or -airbh uisge from the Scottish Gaelic as " water bull , sea bull or cow " with the addition of " fabulous " within parentheses . The Celtic term for a bull is fairly consistently rendered as tarbh in Scottish Gaelic ; tarroo is the Manx variation and tarw is the Welsh equivalent . Uisge is the Scottish Gaelic word for water , river or stream .

= = Folk beliefs = =

= = = Description and common attributes = = =

Belief in the existence of water bulls persisted in Scotland until at least the last quarter of the 19th century . As with many mythological creatures , descriptions are imprecise . The water bull is able to shapeshift into human form , and live on land or in water . It can be a monstrous , malevolent black beast , especially when described as a tarbh uisge , but not as nasty as the each uisge or water horse . It can also be amiable and sometimes helpful . It differs from the Manx tarroo ushtey , which is more likely to be a resident of marshland .

As in the case of kelpies and water horses , most myths about water bulls are about males of the species . Occasionally a water cow is mentioned , as in the Highland tale set at Borrodale on Skye , where a water cow was reputed to reside in a small loch . Canine carcasses left out to trap the beast were ignored . Sir Walter Scott also refers to a water cow in a story about an attempt to drain Loch na Beiste to kill one believed to be living there .

The Manx water bull mating with an ordinary cow usually results in the death of the cow after she produces a dead and " rude lump of flesh and skin without bones " , whereas its Scottish counterpart produces live calves whose only deformity is apparent in their ears . The bulls have no ears themselves and therefore produce calves with only half ears , described by folklorist and Tíre Minister John Gregorson Campbell as " knife @-@ eared " . Water cows living at Leverburgh produce offspring with disfigured crimson or purple @-@ coloured ears .

Folklorist John F. Campbell noted a story told on Islay , one of the Inner Hebridean islands , which demonstrates the usefulness of having a water bull . Just after a calf was born to an ordinary cow , an elderly lady , later identified as a witch , advised the herdsman to keep it separate from the other cattle , presumably after she noticed its deformed ears and suspected it was a water bull . She instructed the herdsman to rear the calf on milk from three different cows and to keep it confined in a stable for a minimum of seven years . Years later , a young woman was grazing cattle at a nearby loch when she was approached by an attractive man . He struck up a conversation with her and shortly afterwards the pair sat on the grass with his head resting in her lap , but as he fell asleep she discovered seaweed entwined in his hair , a sign that he was a water horse . She started to run back to the farm . Her suitor awoke , shapeshifted into his true equine form and chased after her . As the woman ran towards the farm , the witch shouted to the herdsman to release the water bull from the stable . The two creatures fought until they fell into the sea . The water horse never returned , but

the remains of the bull were found the following day .

= = = Capture and killing = = =

Accounts of snaring and destroying the beast are rare , as it is not generally considered to be a threat . In 1819 John MacCulloch , a noted geologist , described how inhabitants around the areas of Loch Awe and Loch Rannoch tried to capture a water bull by shackling a sheep to an oak tree as an enticement , but the tackle was not strong enough . Another story describes a farmer and his two sons hunting a water bull . The farmer 's musket was filled with silver sixpence coins as the beast can only be killed with silver .

According to Celtic mythology scholar James MacKillop , because the calves of water bulls and ordinary cows might bring disaster to the herd , they are supposed to be killed at birth ; it is impossible to kill them by drowning , so other methods have to be used . Conversely , stories published in 1937 by the clergyman George Sutherland suggest these hybrids are considered to be of superior quality to normal pedigree cattle in the far north of Scotland .

= = Origins = =

The bull appears to have had a sacred role in a number of Celtic cults . The animal was viewed positively by the Celts as an image of fertility and abundance ; one tribe , the Taurini , even adopted the bull 's name . It is unknown how it came to be associated with bodies of water in the form of the water bull , but historian and symbologist Charles Milton Smith has suggested that such mythological creatures might originate with the water spouts that can form over the surface of Scottish lochs , which can give the impression of a living form as they move across the water .