

= Boobrie =

The boobrie is a mythological shapeshifting entity inhabiting the lochs of the west coast of Scotland . It commonly adopts the appearance of a gigantic water bird resembling a cormorant or great northern diver , but it can also materialise in the form of various other mythological creatures such as a water bull .

A generally malevolent entity , the boobrie typically preys on livestock being transported on ships , but it is also fond of otters , of which it consumes a considerable number . In its manifestation as a water horse the creature is able to gallop across the top of lochs as if on solid ground . During the summer months it is seen infrequently as a large insect , sucking the blood of horses .

Folklorist Campbell of Islay has speculated that descriptions of the boobrie may be based on sightings of the great auk . The bellowing sound made by the boobrie , more like a bull than a bird , may have its origin in the strange call of the common bittern , which was a rare visitor to Scotland .

= = Etymology = =

Boobrie may derive from boibhre , meaning cow giver or cow bestowing . Edward Dwelly , a Scottish lexicographer , lists tarbh @-@ boidhre as " Monster , demon " and " God capable of changing himself into many forms " ; tarbh @-@ aoidhre is given as a northern counties variation . The simpler component of tarbh as a single word is defined by Dwelly as " bull . " Transcribers of the tale have used several differing spellings of the second component , some even adopting inconsistent variations throughout their own renditions . George Henderson for instance , a folklorist and Celtic scholar , used five alternatives : bo 'eithre ; boidhre ; bo @-@ oibhre ; eithre ; and fhaire . Spelling variations employed by other writers include aoidhre ; baoighre ; baoidhre ; boidhre ; eighre ; and oire .

= = Folk beliefs = =

= = Description and common attributes = =

Investigation into folklore , especially Celtic oral traditions , began in the 19th @-@ century , and several " bizarre " and less familiar beasts were identified , including the boobrie . It is a generally malevolent entity , with the ability to materialise in the form of various mythical creatures . It commonly preys on animals being transported on ships , preferably calves , but will also happily eat lambs and sheep , carrying its prey away to the deepest water before consuming it . It is also extremely fond of otters , which it consumes in large quantities .

In its favoured bird manifestation the boobrie resembles a gigantic great northern diver or cormorant , but with white markings . According to folklorist Campbell of Islay , a detailed account of its dimensions provided by an authoritative source claims that it is " larger than seventeen of the biggest eagles put together " . It has a strong black beak about 11 inches ( 280 mm ) wide and 17 inches ( 430 mm ) in length , the final 5 inches ( 130 mm ) of which taper like that of an eagle . The creature 's neck is almost 3 feet ( 0 @. @ 91 m ) long with a girth of a little under 2 feet ( 0 @. @ 61 m ) . Short black powerful legs lead to webbed feet with gigantic claws . An imprint of a boobrie 's foot left in some lakeside mud equalled " the span of a large wide @-@ spreading pair of red deer 's horns " . It bellows noisily with displeasure , sounding more like a bull than a bird . The design of its wings is more conducive to swimming rather than for flight . Its evil powers when in the form of a bird were said by Campbell of Islay to have " terrified a minister out of his propriety " . The boobrie 's insatiable appetite for livestock posed a threat to local farmers , as they relied on their animals as a means of providing income and food .

Although sea lochs are the boobries ' natural home they will shelter on land in overgrown heather . Accounts are inconsistent as to the extent of the boobrie 's habitat . Campbell of Islay claims that it is specific to the lochs of Argyllshire , as does Emeritus Professor of English James MacKillop . The

writers Katharine Briggs and Patricia Monaghan on the other hand consider the creature 's range to be the broader Scottish Highlands , although Briggs does sometimes specify Argyllshire . Campbell of Islay 's undated manuscript notes the boobrie had not been seen for several years probably due to the widespread burning of heather in the area of its habitat .

= = = Alternative manifestations = = =

When manifested as a water horse the creature is able to gallop across the top of lochs ; the beating noise of the creature 's hooves on the water is the same as if it were galloping on solid ground .

Henderson reproduced parts of Campbell of Islay 's manuscripts when writing *Survivals in belief among the Celts* ( 1911 ) . Among them is a story listed as " boobrie as tarbh uisge " . The tale starts by detailing how a man named Eachann fed a colossal black bull when he discovered it writhing in pain and possibly close to death at the side of Loch nan Dobhran , on the west coast of Argyll . Some months later , Phemie , Eachann 's girlfriend , is occasionally disturbed by elusive shadows she senses on the loch , which make her think of Murdoch , her former paramour . While she sat dreaming of Eachann one evening when staying at a sheiling near the loch , she sensed the flicker of a shadow behind her , except this time it was Murdoch . He promptly overpowered her by enveloping her in a blanket and tying her hands . At that point , a water bull came to Phemie 's rescue by knocking Murdoch to the ground . The bull then knelt down allowing Phemie to get on its back , before transporting her at the speed of light back to the home of her mother . The bull disappeared never to be seen again but a " voice was heard in the air calling out loudly " . The verse heard was in Gaelic , and translates as :

It is then asserted that the tale " reveals the persistence in folk @-@ belief of the idea of transformation , the boobrie being the abode of a spirit " .

The boobrie can also manifest itself in the form of a large insect that sucks the blood of horses . Henderson refers to it as a " big striped brown gobhlachan or ear @-@ wig " with " lots of tentacles or feelers " . It was infrequently seen in this form , usually only at the height of the summer , during August and September .

= = = Capture and hunting = = =

A farmer and his son were ploughing a field on the Isle of Mull using a team of four horses beside Loch Freisa , but work stalled after one of the horses lost a shoe and was unable to continue . Noticing a horse grazing nearby they decided to try using it as a replacement . Once harnessed to the wooden plough the horse appeared to be familiar with the task , and initially worked steadily . As it began to work towards an area closest to the loch , it became restless and the farmer gently used a whip to encourage the animal to continue . It reacted by immediately transforming into a gigantic boobrie , giving out a loud bellow and diving into the loch , pulling the plough and the other three horses with it . The frightened farmer and his son watched as the creature swam to the centre of the loch then dived underwater , taking the other horses and plough with it . Seven hours later there was still no sign of the three horses .

In a story transcribed by John Campbell of Kilberry , a hunter attempted to shoot a boobrie after he spotted it in its bird @-@ like manifestation on a sea loch one chilly February day . The man paddled into the loch until the water was up to his shoulders , but when he was about 85 yards ( 78 m ) from the creature it dived under the water . The hunter maintained his position for forty @-@ five minutes before returning to the shore , where he remained for a further six hours waiting unsuccessfully for the boobrie to resurface . No clear indication is given of the loch 's whereabouts .

= = Origins = =

Campbell of Islay speculates that the boobrie may have originated from sightings of the great auk . He noted he had been told stories of the creature by various people , and regarded it as having " a

real existence in the popular mind " . He considered the tale of the boobrie in its water horse manifestation resembled the Norse myth of " the ploughing of the Asa " . Referring to Forbes ' 1905 dictionary of " Gaelic names of beasts " in which bubaire is defined as a common bittern , and a detailed description given by scholar James Logie Robertson of the bull o ' the bog ( an alternative name for a bittern ) in The Scotsman in 1908 , Henderson hypothesises that the boobrie may stem from the bittern . Referring to the bittern 's " strangely weird sound " and highlighting its " weird hollow cry " during the night and throughout the evening , he describes it as resembling quietly bellowing cattle , particularly during the bird 's breeding season . Records indicate that the bird was rare in Scotland but had been sighted in the first decade of the 20th century , although catching sight of a bittern was believed to be a harbinger of death or disaster .