



50 years with UFOs

- conclusions of 50 years' report investigation

The organisation Scandinavian UFO Information (SUFOI) was created in 1957. Since then SUFOI has collected and processed around 15,000 reports of unusual aerial phenomena. The experiences from this work are put together in the book *50 år med ufoer (50 Years With UFOs)*, released to mark SUFOI's 50-year anniversary. Here follow the main conclusions.

Reports are the core of the phenomenon

Our knowledge of the UFO phenomenon is based entirely on witnesses' verbal and written reports of observations of aerial phenomena. In other words, the reports constitute the core of the phenomenon, and when we talk about UFOs, it is actually *reports of UFOs* we are discussing.

From testimony to experience

Witnesses' reports do not constitute "objective testimony" about the observed phenomenon; rather, the reports are expressions of personal *experiences*. They are therefore always an interpretation of the phenomenon that led to the witness's experience. An interpretation that in some cases is very close to the actual appearance of what is observed – in others, very far from it.

From this insight, it follows that the witnesses come to play a key role in the analysis of the UFO phenomenon. It becomes crucial to investigate how far perceptual psychology, psychological and cultural conditions affect the witnesses' experiences.

Part of the witnesses' experiences of aerial phenomena are their emotional and psychological reactions. Witnesses react very differently – from a level-headed and matter-of-fact attitude, through nervousness or slight anxiety, to actual terror and panic. There is, however, only a weak connection between how the witnesses react and how well their observations can subsequently be explained.

False perception is a common phenomenon

False perception – an incorrect interpretation of sensory input – is very common with observations of aerial phenomena. This is especially true of night sightings, which comprise the bulk of SUFOI's cases. Judgements of distance and size are usually wrong, but impressions of shape and movement are often incorrect as well.



The witnesses experience false perception as just as “real” or “correct” as if there was “correct” perception. An incorrect judgement of, for example, the distance or shape of the phenomenon appears just as “true” for the witness as a correct judgement would have done. In many cases the witnesses’ experience of false perception is “disrupted”, which complicates their attempt to identify what they are seeing. Moreover, in many cases false perception *enhances* the extraordinary and bizarre features of the witness’s experience, for example when a witness feels he is being followed by a distance light, such as a star.

Not all disagreements between a phenomenon’s actual appearance and the witness’s experience of it can be explained as being a result of “normal” false perception. In some cases there are unusually large deviations, which suggests that psychological and cultural conditions also play a part, although experience from SUFOI’s investigative work does not make it possible to draw any clear conclusions on the significance of psychology.

Cultural influences

In certain cases, cultural conceptions of the UFO phenomenon are thought to colour the witnesses’ experiences in such a way that these experiences come to diverge markedly from the phenomenon’s actual appearance and behaviour. In these cases there is a tendency to misinterpret what is observed in favour of the prevailing conceptions of UFOs. This serves to heighten the witnesses’ sense of strangeness.

False connections mislead

In a number of notable cases, the witnesses make a connection between several mutually independent phenomena, which are then experienced as one phenomenon. These *false connections* make the witnesses’ experiences very strange – not just for the witnesses themselves, but also for SUFOI’s investigators. Such cases are therefore difficult to resolve, and often it is only thorough investigation and/or sheer luck that brings an explanation to light. For this reason alone, it may be assumed that among the unexplained cases there exist several that involve false connections.

Diversity of the IFO phenomenon

We are surrounded on a daily basis by innumerable natural and man-made phenomena that, under the correct conditions, can lead to “UFO experiences”. The majority of SUFOI’s reports can therefore be explained by known phenomena (also referred to as “IFO phenomena” – IFO stands for *Identified Flying Object*).

Because of the diversity of *potential IFO phenomena*, in most cases it is not possible to determine *in advance* which phenomena could have been the cause of an actual sighting. The work involved in identifying an observation can therefore be compared to identifying the subject of a picture from a limited number of fragments of that picture – some of which may even be “distorted” by false perception, cultural influences, psychological conditions and so on.

Taking these considerations into account, among the unexplained cases there must necessarily be events that *could* have been identified if the investigator had had access to the



right information. How many cases is, however, impossible to determine. Furthermore, this insight means that we must give up differentiating between UFO and IFO reports, if we understand “UFO reports” to mean reports of phenomena that are “truly” extraordinary and essentially different to the IFO phenomena.

UFO phenomenon’s many faces

In summary it can be concluded that SUFOI’s investigations show there is not just one, but *many*, explanations for people’s experiences, and that these must be sought in many places. The term “UFO phenomenon” thus covers a multitude of phenomena and factors that each play their own part. Some of these affect a large number of the observations (e.g. false perception), while others are significant for a smaller number. Together these phenomena and factors make up all the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle called UFOs. In other words, the UFO phenomenon has “many faces”!

From this it also follows that every single sighting report should be handled and understood as a *unique* report. Therefore in every single case we must explain, through a thorough gathering of information, which phenomena and factors could *potentially* have played a part in the actual sighting.

The investigative work does not give a definitive answer to the question *what are UFOs?* However it contributes a large number of elements to the overall explanation of the UFO phenomenon by documenting the conditions and phenomena that can lead to “UFO sightings”.

The book “50 år med ufoer” (50 Years With UFOs) is written by Toke Haunstrup and published by SUFOI. 144 pages, 180 Danish kroner. Richly illustrated. Released at SUFOI’s anniversary conference on 10 November 2007 at Lyngby Culture House, Denmark.

