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Hobbit opens Bigfoot door

On an Indonesian island, an extremely diminutive humanoid species has been identified from fossil remains only 12,000 years old. Once the sole purview of legend, these small skeletons were dubbed "Hobbits."

The existence of these creatures, contiguous with our species, has pretty seriously upset the anthropological appcart. It has only recently been accepted that our species co-existed in primeval times with, not only Neanderthals, but also with *Homo erectus* and others.

Throw these Hobbits into the mix and suddenly it's starting to feel like a very crowded prehistory. Not to mention the Hobbits' amazingly small forms, which challenge complacent notions about the limits of hominid morphology.

Some conservative scientists still don't accept that the fossilized Hobbit bones represent a new species. They argue that the bones are merely those of diseased humans.

But the weight of the data from many studies has turned the tide of the debate. Henry Gee, the evolution editor of the incredibly conservative *Nature*, has accepted the Hobbit as evidence of a new species for a few years now. So it's basically a done deal.

The discovery of the Hobbits has made it screamingly obvious that our family tree is broader and weirder than previously recognized. As evidence of a sea change in the scientific establishment caused by the Hobbit, it has become acceptable for very scientifically conservative voices, like Henry Gee, to wonder aloud if Bigfoot is such a crazy idea after all.

This is undoubtedly welcome news for the various trained scientists already on the Bigfoot case, previously derided as weirdoes and ostracized from the establishment. Real proof of the establishment's sincerity will be in its reception towards the work of these Bigfoot-chasers.

Will they remain in the scientific wilderness? Will their work get published in peer-reviewed journals? Will they stop getting passed over for promotions? Time will tell.

Speaking of Henry Gee, he wrote a 2004 editorial where (to the surprise of many) he lay down some cover fire for the weirdoes. Referencing the Hobbit and then the discovery of a new species of ox in Vietnam, he wrote:

If animals as large as oxen can remain hidden into an era when we would expect that scientists had rustled every tree and bush in search of new forms of life, there is no reason why the same should not apply to new species of large primate, including members of the human family...If it turns out that the diversity of human beings...might not be entirely extinguished, we are entitled to question the security of some of our deepest beliefs.

He sounds just like the cryptozoologists his profession scorned for decades. Coming from him, this basically means Bigfoot is now to be regarded as a serious scientific possibility.

Gee went on to tell the BBC News this year: "People would love there to be yetis, leprechauns, Bigfoots, sasquatches and Hobbits and other strange little people of our imaginations coming to life. These have been, until now, entirely matters of folklore and speculation, but this discovery suggests that there may be some truth in the old tales."

Not to mention truth in contemporary tales. Loren Coleman, America's greatest living cryptozoologist, has literally written the book on the topic.

In 2004, he noted that Hobbit-like creatures are still being reported in Indonesia and throughout the Pacific Islands. Coleman essentially called for a cryptozoological Manhattan Project to find the living Hobbits he is sure are out there:

Local natives on Flores have one hundred year old legends of a small hairy people, the *Ebu Gogo*, and clues from these tales will be employed to find new caves to explore for evidence of their former little habitants. While Sumatra's *Orang Pendek* has been mentioned in the same context as the media nicknamed "Hobbits" of Flores, the more relevant cryptids are not anthropoids, but the fully manlike ones, such as the *Nittaewo*, the three feet tall hairy hominids of ancient Ceylon (Sri Lanka)—mentioned by Pliny in the first century—who were said to exist to the end of the 18th Century. It is time to look again at reports of little people, with an eye to the discovery of their subfossil remains and living existence, from Sri Lanka to the South Pacific...The time is assuredly upon us to expand the Hobbit hunt.

And once living Hobbits are found, you can bet Bigfoot won't be far behind.

