

New World Wonders



For explorers and colonists from Europe, North and South America were full of strange new lifeforms—stunning and surprising plants and animals, from insects to birds to sea creatures. Examine the following drawings and descriptions created by European visitors to the Americas. Can you identify what plant or animal is being described or depicted?

1. In 1609 Captain John Smith encountered and later described a noxious plant in the New World:

"... the poisonous weede being in shape but little different from our English yuie, but being touched cause thrednesse, itchinge, and lastly blysters, the which, howsoever, after a while they passe away of themselves without further harme; yet because for the time they are somewhat painefull, and in aspect dangerous, it hath gotten to itselife an ill name, although questionlesse of noe very ill nature." [1]

What was this plant?

- Jimson weed.
- Poison ivy.
- Virginia creeper.
- Sumac.

2. In 1620, Oppenheim printer Theodore de Bry published *America*, in which he richly illustrated part of *The East and West Indian Mirror*, a book published the previous year that narrated Georg Spielbergen's expedition in 1614-1617 around the world.

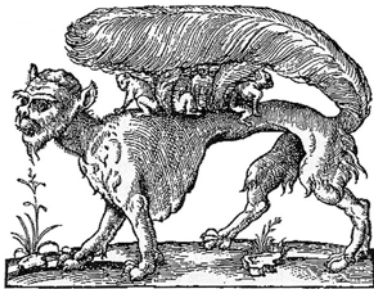


This is one of de Bry's illustrations, showing Europeans in the New World [2].

What are the animals the men in the foreground are hunting?

- Bison (American Buffalo).
- Ground Sloths.
- Mountain Lions.
- Sea Lions.

3. In 1557 in Paris, Andre Thevet published, *Singularities de la France Antarctique*. It was translated into English and published the following year in London. It described and pictured some of the wildlife of Patagonia, present-day Argentina and Chile. One of the illustrations shows a "su," which Thevet said was "a ravenous beast made after a strange maner."



[3]

What was this animal?

- No real animal. It was a griffin.
- A Patagonian wolf.
- A kind of opossum.
- A macaque (New World monkey).

4. Captain John Smith's *General Historie of Virginia* has the following passage:

"Plums there are of three sorts. The red and white are like our hedge plums, but the other which they call Putchamins, grow as high as a Palmeta: the fruit is like a Medler; it is first greene, then yellow, and red when it is ripe; if it be not ripe, it will draw a mans mouth awry, with much torment, but when it is ripe, it is as delicious as an Apricot." [4]

What is Smith describing?

- Paw-paws.
- Breadfruit.
- Persimmons.
- Date Palms.

5. In 1530, Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, in his *De Orbo Novo*, wrote of the Indians of Hispaniola (present day Haiti and the Dominican Republic):

"They dygge also owte of the ground certeyne rootes growynge of theimselues, which they caule ____, much lykevnto the nauie rootes of Mylayne, or the greate puffes or musheroms of the earth. Howe sooeuer they bee dressed, eyther fryed or sodde, they gyue place to noo such kynde of meate in pleasant tenderness. The skyn is sumwhat towgher then eyther of nauies or musheroms, and of earthy coloure: But the inner meate thereof, is verye whyte. ... They are also eaten rawe, and haue the taste of rawe chestnuttes, but are sumwhat sweeter." [5]

What goes in the blank?

- "Boletas," that is, West Indian truffles.
- "Yams," that is, yams.
- "Botatas," that is, potatoes.
- "Goebos," that is, parsnips.

6. Miguel de Asua and Robert French, in *A New World of Animals: Early Modern Europeans on the Creatures of Iberian America*, describe Christopher Columbus's voyages to the New World. Their account of Admiral Columbus's first voyage lists many of the strange flora and fauna that the excited explorer discovered. Their account has this passage:

"But his elated mood probably plunged at the view of what he describes as a 'serpent' seven feet long and one foot wide. The beast escaped and disappeared into a pool, but was speared by the Spaniards and afterwards recovered and skinned. The Admiral, always mindful of the curiosity of his sovereigns about the marvels of nature, set down in his log that he had ordered the skin to be salted and kept in store to be later presented to them. Despite the terrifying appearance of the animal, the newcomers eventually became used to its meat, which had a pleasant flavour."^[6]

The following illustration shows the Spaniards hunting these creatures:



What were they?

- Iguanas.
- Pythons.
- Alligators.
- Caribbean Salamanders.

Sources:

[1] Captain John Smith, *The Historye of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Islands*, 1624. *Generall Historie of the Bermudas, now called the Summer Iles* (London, 1624), 170.

[2] *America (pars undecima)*, appendix, plate xx, reproduced in Miguel de Asua and Robert French, *A New World of Animals: Early Modern Europeans on the Creatures of Iberian America* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005), 120.

[3] The illustration is reproduced in De Asua and French, *A New World of Animals*, 154-55. The description from Pietro Martire is from Edward Arber, Richard Eden, Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, *The First Three English Books on America* (Birmingham, 1885), 98.

[4] The quote is from John Smith, *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, 26.

[5] Pietro Martire d'Anghiera, translated by Richard Eden, edited by Edward Arber, *The First Three English Books on America* (Birmingham, 1885), 131.

[6] Miguel de Asua and Robert French, *A New World of Animals: Early Modern Europeans on the Creatures of Iberian America* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005), 2-3.