

Matter 12

Summary

The Red Lion

Account by:	Ursula Leadbetter, 66. Retired postmistress.
Source:	Letter.
Location:	Uley, Gloucestershire, England.
Event:	4 Aug 1987.
Report:	13 Aug 1987.
Catalogued:	12 Mar 1990.

Report

Dear RSPCA,

I wonder if you might be able to help me identify a small creature I encountered while walking my dog last week.

It was Tuesday morning at around 8:15 a.m., and we were up on West Hill near the Roman shrine. There are some very nice woods nearby. The weather was sunny, the air crisp and clear, and the skies were yet to cloud over.

Dheghōm

I had my dog (a springer spaniel named Reuben) on a long leash. We had been walking for perhaps a quarter of an hour when he caught the scent of something. I tried to call him back, but he was insistent. Well, sometimes one hears of dog-walkers finding the remains of dead bodies in remote places, so I thought I'd better indulge Reuben's instincts and find out what was diverting him.

He led me to an open patch of ground among the trees, where played the creature about which I wish to ask your advice. I use the word "played" quite particularly, because it romped and rolled around as if enjoying itself.

The creature had the appearance of an adult male lion with antlers, yet it seemed to be young – a kitten, rather than a cat, if you will. It was about the size of a Scottish terrier, red in colour with disproportionately large, yellow eyes. I have come across nothing like it before in either fact or fiction.

Although the creature seemed friendly enough to me, Reuben apparently regarded it as a threat. He crouched down low, monitoring the animal, the movements of which were quite repetitive. His intention was clearly to protect me, but I had not anticipated that he would take an "attack is the best form of defence" point of view! He leapt at the creature, teeth bared, when its back was turned.

I can't be sure of what happened next. It certainly looked to me as if Reuben passed straight through the red lion; Reuben himself was certainly

confused! He made a second attempt to chase it off, but again seemed to have a problem. He thereupon swiftly returned to me, in a state of some fear. All the while, the creature continued to frolic as if nothing had happened.

A few moments later, a tall man appeared. By his colouring, he looked to be an Indian or Persian gentleman. I bade him good morning and asked if the creature was his, but he replied in a language I don't know. The small, red lion stopped its gambling and scampered to his heels, whereupon it followed him as he strode off towards Nymphsfield.

Reuben is a sensitive dog and his nerves were in tatters, so I elected to take him home rather than to follow the stranger – who looked to have chosen his clothes from an Iron-Age catalogue, I might add.

I wonder if perhaps you might be able to enlighten me as to what the odd creature that I saw might have been, or, if not, perhaps direct me towards an authority that could?

Yours sincerely,

U. E. Leadbetter

Dheghōm

Notes

The creature Mrs Leadbetter describes shares several features with the Stratford Lion, a beast that appears in a folk tale native to the New Forest (some 70 miles south-southeast of Uley).

On 18 Jan 2013, the poet and songwriter Love Ellis (19) was involved in a car accident near Uley in which her boyfriend, Simon Clarke-Spencer (21), was killed.