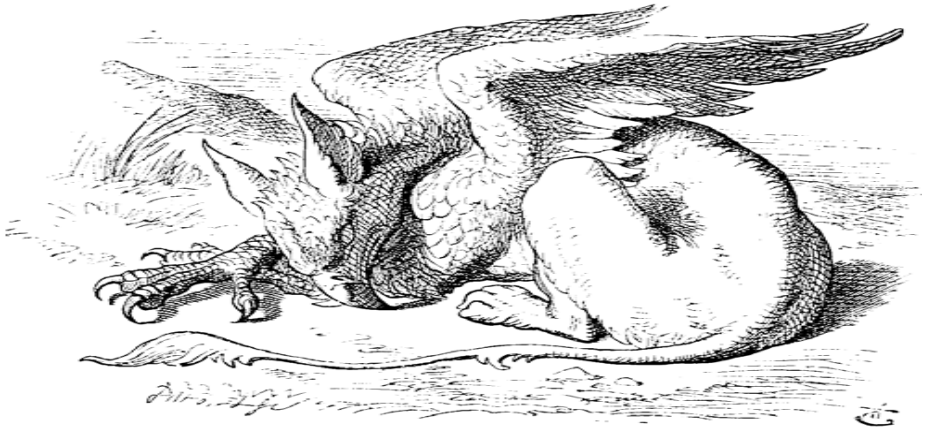
An A to Z of Dragonlore *(twelfth instalment)*

WEREWOLF, a monster in human form who is transformed into a wolf during the nights of full moon.
WINGED CREATURES, almost any creature can become fabulous with the addition of wings. Apart from Pegasus, the winged horse from Greek Mythology, winged lions and bulls are of great antiquity, depicted in relief on the buildings of Babylon, though now more familiar as symbols of St Mark and St Luke.
WYVERN, an ancient two-legged winged dragon of the West particularly associated with Wessex, and possibly derived from the cohort standard of the Roman legions, it is now a favourite creature in heraldry.
XENOPUS, the giant toad of the Greeks, about which many legends of its magical powers have grown.
YALE, a huge ox-like beast with tusks and swivelling horns, a favourite with Tudor heralds, some think it may have been based on the mountain goat.
YETI, the "abominable snowman" of the Himalayas, who leaves footprints in the snow but is seldom if ever seen.
YPOTRYLL, a curious beast recorded as an heraldic badge in Tudor times, with tusks, cloven hooves and two humps on his back.
ZIMBABWE BIRD, a strange rock-carving in the ancient ruins of the Mashona people since adopted as a crest by the government of Southern Rhodesia, now re-named Zimbabwe.
ZIZ, in Hebrew myth, the largest of all birds that can even darken the light of the sun when flying overhead.
ZZZZZZZ…..the sound of snoring, so what better way to finish this alphabet than with Tenniell's sleeping Griffin.



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Dragonlore

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A Basilisk with the arms of Basel, from a Swiss printer's woodcut of 1511

The College of Dracology for the Study of Fabulous Beasts

Two important new works of dracology have appeared, very different in presentation and in attitude, but each excellent in its own way and thoroughly recommended.

DRAGONS: A Natural History by Dr Karl Shuker with a Foreword by Dr Desmond Morris (Aurum Press, London 1995) is copiously illustrated from a wide range of sources, ancient and modern. This book describes a variety of dragons and similar creatures (Basilisk, Hydra, Leviathan, Salamander, Wyvern among others) and wittily recounts the legends told about them in what is best described as a snazzy, eye-catching style. Shuker is always looking for a natural explanation of each legendary creature, perhaps a dinosaur survivor that entered folklore in the distant past and has resisted repeated re-tellings with some inevitable distortions and romanticisms, or maybe a rare extant animal just occasionally seen that has not yet been isolated and recorded zoologically, but may yet be if we are patient. There are still some parts of the world that have not been exhaustively explored. Dr Morris confesses that he would have liked to have written this book himself, had not Dr Shuker already done so, which tends to confirm the philosophy underlying it, namely that science is the revealer of truth and fables are but fantasy. This point of view is persuasively presented, not without humour, and is worth perusing. The bibliography lists 85 works. Shuker uses the term "dracontologist" which I take to mean "one who studies the development of dragons" and he certainly qualifies for this description.

Very different in style and ethos is **Mythical Beasts** edited by John Cherry (British Museum Press, London 1995) in which the Editor contributes an Introduction and a chapter on **Unicorns**, with others on **Dragons** by Sheila R. Canby, **Griffins** by Peter Armour, **Sphinxes** by Henrietta McCall, and **Half-Human Creatures** by Helen King. All these authors are art historians, with a deep understanding of the true nature of their subjects, namely the evolution of human imagination and experience. Beautifully written and illustrated with a lightness of touch combined with profound scholarship, this book is a masterpiece in its field. The illustrated Glossary lists 168 named creatures from art and antiquity around the world (*from which our cover picture is taken)* and the Bibliography has no fewer than 195 entries, an essential reference for every serious dracologist.

Perhaps there is a bias in considering the products of human creativity as existing in a world of their own set apart from the realm that scientists regard as the "real world" just as students of literature can discuss fictional characters as if they had a life apart from their appearance in print. I believe that a complete understanding of Dragons and their peers will be impossible without taking both points of view fully into account. This may prove to be a difficult task and some may even regard it as impossible, a reconciliation of opposites, but as Alice was advised to think three impossible things before breakfast, it behoves all students of dragonlore to make the attempt.

Fabulous Beasts in Swiss Heraldry

The **Basilisk** supporter of the City of Basel's arms (*see cover)* is a nice piece of word-play. Other examples are Berne's Bear, Bibern's Beaver and Greifenau's Griffin. The best of the one-volume books on Swiss heraldry is **Wappen und Fahnen der Schweiz** (Swiss Arms and Flags) by Louis Mühlemann (Reich Verlag, Luzern 1977) and there are plenty of other books displaying the arms of communes in each of the Cantons. Amongst a multitude of indigenous fauna—bears, wolves, mountain goats, storks and other birds—there are not a lot of fabulous beasts, just a sprinkling of unicorns, griffins, two-headed eagles and dragons (mostly being slain by St George, probably the best known of these being the arms of the beautifully preserved little medieval town of Stein-am-Rhein), but one or two surprises: Brig has a serpent-tailed eagle, Itingau and Mauensee both have a fish with bird's wings and Fällenden has a lion with a peacock's tail. It is possible that griffins and wyverns were too closely associated with the old feudal lords to be popular with the Swiss, whose heraldry is a celebration of the rights of the common people and contains copious charges from peasant life such as ploughshares, bunches of grapes, pitchforks, reaphooks, haystacks and the like.

Fabulous Beasts in the Royal Air Force and the Fleet Air Arm

Further to the comment in the last issue (No. 11) that there seem to have been very few aircraft named after fabulous beasts, a new publication has clarified the position. **Names with Wings** by Gordon Wansborough-White (Airlife, Shrewsbury 1995) gives a complete list of the names given to all aircraft and aero-engines flown by the British armed forces from 1878 to 1994, and these include Antelope, Argus, Basilisk, Dolphin, Dragon, Griffin, Martlet, Panther, Phoenix, Roc, Salamander, Scylla, Seafox, Sealion, Snark, Vampire, Wyvern and Yale (though this last was an American trainer aircraft named after the University, a smaller sister of the better-known Harvard). Another five would not have been considered fabulous, and of the rest only six ever reached squadron service.