

ASTRO-NEWS

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Center for UFO Studies Established

Over the last quarter century hundreds of thousands of unidentified flying object (UFO) reports have been received by various private and government agencies. The unexplained content of many reports from credible witnesses from all parts of the world continues to present a modern scientific enigma.

"Any phenomenon which has occupied the thought of so many people for so many years is surely worthy of serious scientific study," says J. Allen Hynek, probably the world's foremost

authority on the subject. "The UFO phenomenon has not been given serious attention in the past," Hynek insists, "yet it is an incontrovertible fact that a great many unsolved UFO reports exist."

Hynek, chairman of the astronomy department at Northwestern University, says the phenomenon has been the subject of misconceptions, misinformation, and an unscientific approach. To help rectify the situation Hynek and a group of selected scientists have established the Center for UFO Studies

"for those who wish to see positive scientific action taken to end a quarter of a century of misrepresentation and buffoonery."

Hynek believes the evidence is strong that the UFO phenomenon represents new empirical observations of great potential value to mankind. The work of the Center is directed toward discovery of the essential nature of the UFO phenomenon.

Hynek has disputed the scientific validity of two major UFO studies conducted so far — both government sponsored projects. One, the so-called Condon report, is based on the two year research of a group of prominent scientists headed by Dr. Edward Condon, a noted physicist. Although the negative conclusions of the Condon report (suggesting UFO's receive no further study) were widely circulated in the press, Hynek and others have found that 25 percent of the cases studied remain unexplained.

The other major study, Project Blue Book, was "a cosmic Watergate, or else gross incompetence" according to Hynek who was its scientific consultant for 20 years. "Many interesting cases with scientific potential were disregarded," he said. Of the Blue Book cases, 20 percent were unexplained — yet the project was closed in 1969 on the basis of the Condon conclusions.

The Center for UFO Studies defines a UFO as "the reported perception of an object or light seen in the sky or upon land; the appearance, trajectory, and general dynamic and luminescent behavior of which do not suggest a logical, conventional explanation, and which is not only mystifying to the original percipient but remains unidentified after close scrutiny of all available evidence by persons who are

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Meteorites Reveal Carbon Molecules

More evidence that life on the primitive Earth may have been triggered by chemical evolution of non-living matter has been uncovered by a team of National Aeronautics and Space Administration scientists at NASA's Ames Research Center. In studies to find links between living and nonliving matter, the team of researchers has discovered 17 varieties of fatty acids in two recently examined meteorites. The fatty acids are similar to those used by plants and animals to produce even more complex biological molecules, and are commonly found in household staples such as milk, margarine, fruits and vinegar.

The fatty acids were found in tiny samples of the Murray and Murchison carbonaceous meteorites. Because the samples were taken from the inside of the meteorites under scrupulously clean laboratory conditions, the chances that the acids are the result of terrestrial contamination are remote.

Some of these basic building blocks of life have been produced in the laboratory by other scientists. In these experiments, energy was applied to a

mixture of chemicals such as methane, hydrogen, ammonia and water, which is thought to be similar to the atmosphere of the newly-formed Earth. The product of the experiment was a mixture of relatively complex molecules, including simple amino acids and at least 9 of the 17 fatty acids isolated by the Ames scientists.

The family of simple carbon-hydrogen acid molecules found in the meteorites has counterparts in biologically-formed Earth materials, but they have never been found in non-organic sources like rocks. The mystery is how an extraterrestrial rock — a meteorite — could contain these materials which are basic to the biology of plants and animals.

Though the total amount of the substances examined is extremely small — a ton of similar meteorite material might yield 1/2 pound of the fatty acids — their existence is a new clue to how the evolution of non-living chemical compounds has provided nature with the essential building blocks of living materials.