

The 2021 Canadian UFO Survey

Overview

Since 1989, Ufology Research (formerly Ufology Research of Manitoba) has solicited UFO case data from known and active investigators and researchers in Canada. The goal has been to provide data for use by researchers trying to understand this controversial phenomenon.

2021 marked the 33rd year of collecting and analysing Canadian UFO report data by Ufology Research, with the total number of Canadian UFO reports in the database now nearing 23,000 in total. Tables of most Canadian UFO reports included in the annual surveys from 1989 to the present are available online at: <http://survey.canadianuforeport.com>

The 2021 Canadian UFO Survey: Summary of Results

- There were 722 UFO sightings recorded in Canada in 2021, a decrease of 42 per cent from 2020. The number of UFO sightings reported in Canada in 2021 was the lowest since 2003, almost 20 years ago.
- In 2021, Ontario led all Canadian provinces with 30 per cent of all Canadian UFO reports, unchanged from previous years. Ontario was followed by Quebec (23 per cent) and BC (14 per cent, down slightly from 17 per cent in 2020). Nova Scotia saw an increase in reports from five per cent to eight per cent.
- In 2021, about 7.2 percent of all UFO reports were classified as unexplained.
- The typical UFO sighting lasted approximately 13 minutes in 2021.

The study found that in 2021, about 51 per cent of all UFO sightings were of simple lights in the sky. Witnesses also reported triangles, spheres, and boomerangs.

Of most significance in the 2021 Canadian UFO Survey was the comparison with 2020, when UFO report numbers were at a much higher level. UFO report numbers surged in 2020 over 2019 levels, but in 2021, they dropped to a level not seen in decades. While it is tempting to suggest the pandemic had an effect on the fluctuation in UFO sightings, further studies will be needed to understand the factors involved.

Results of this study show that many people continue to report unusual objects in the sky, and some of these objects do not have obvious explanations. Many witnesses are pilots, police and other individuals with reasonably good observing capabilities and good judgement.

Despite the decline in report numbers in 2021, there are still at least two UFO sightings reported each day in Canada. Some of these could have explanations such as military exercises and overflights occurring over populated areas. In addition, people are often unaware of the nature of conventional or natural objects in the sky. The good news is that people are taking the time to observe their surroundings, and reporting UFO sightings is made easier through social media and phone apps. The downturn in the economy may be leading to a desire by some to look skyward for assistance.

Popular opinion to the contrary, there is no incontrovertible evidence that some UFO cases involve extraterrestrial contact. The continued reporting of UFOs by the public and the yearly increase in numbers of UFO reports suggests a need for further examination of the phenomenon by social, medical and/or physical scientists.

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UFO reports in Canada

The following table shows the number of reported UFOs per year since 1989, collected by Ufology Research.

| Year | Number |
|------|--------|
| 1989 | 154 |
| 1990 | 254 |
| 1991 | 169 |
| 1992 | 223 |
| 1993 | 482 |
| 1994 | 189 |
| 1995 | 183 |
| 1996 | 258 |
| 1997 | 284 |
| 1998 | 195 |
| 1999 | 259 |
| 2000 | 263 |
| 2001 | 375 |
| 2002 | 483 |
| 2003 | 673 |
| 2004 | 882 |
| 2005 | 769 |
| 2006 | 738 |
| 2007 | 836 |
| 2008 | 1004 |
| 2009 | 831 |
| 2010 | 968 |
| 2011 | 986 |
| 2012 | 1982 |
| 2013 | 1180 |
| 2014 | 1021 |
| 2015 | 1268 |
| 2016 | 1131 |
| 2017 | 1101 |
| 2018 | 937 |
| 2019 | 849 |
| 2020 | 1243 |
| 2021 | 722 |

The number of UFO reports per year has varied, although there has been a general trend towards a gradual increase in yearly UFO report numbers over the past 30 years until 2015, and then a slow but steady decline. The spike in 2020 is not well understood.

Although there may be a perceived notion that UFOs are not being reported with as much frequency as in the past, UFOs have not “gone away.” This data clearly contradicts comments by those who would assert that UFOs are a ‘passing fad’ or that UFO sightings are decreasing.

For this study, the working definition of a UFO is: “an object seen in the sky which its observer cannot identify.”

Polls have shown that about ten per cent of the Canadian population believe they have seen UFOs. This means that about 3.7 million Canadians have seen UFOs. However, studies have also shown that only about ten per cent of all witnesses of UFOs report their experiences (although this percentage is thought to be much lower).

UFO witnesses range from farmhands to airline pilots and from teachers to police officers. Witnesses represent all age groups and racial origin. What is being observed? In most cases, only ordinary objects. However, this begs a question. If people are reporting things that can be explained, then the objects they observed were “really there.” Were the objects we can't identify “really there” as well? If so, what were they?

These are questions that only continued and rational research can answer, and only if researchers have the support and encouragement of both scientists and the public.

Method

Data for each UFO case was obtained by Ufology Research from participating researchers across Canada, through receipt of reports directly from witnesses, or through data mining of known websites devoted to UFO reports. This method has not changed significantly during the past 30 years.

Sources for the 2021 Canadian UFO cases included:

UFO groups and organizations:

AQU, AUFOSG, GARPAN, KBCCUFO, MUFON, NUFORC, UFOBC, Ufology Research, UFOSNW, Vike

Government sources:

Transport Canada, CIRVIS reports

Social media:

Facebook, Reddit, Twitter, Youtube

The original intent of the Canadian UFO Survey was to understand exactly how many cases were being reported in a given year, and how they were distributed across the country. It was

also deemed desirable to know other characteristics of the UFO reports, such as predominant colours, the durations of sightings, reported shapes, and which UFO types were most common.

The information available on each case was then coded by members of Ufology Research, entered into a database, and statistically analysed. Information on almost all UFO sightings in 2021 was obtained through online sources.

An example of the coding key is as follows:

Example: 2021 01 09 1530 Vernon BC DD 900 silver 2 ps 6 5 UFOBC p 4 objs. seen

Field: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

Field 1 is a default YEAR for the report.

Field 2 is the MONTH of the incident.

Field 3 is the DATE of the sighting.

Field 4 is the local TIME, on the 24-hour clock.

Field 5 is the geographical LOCATION of the incident.

Field 6 is the PROVINCE where the sighting occurred.

Field 7 is the TYPE of report, using the Modified Hynek Classification System.

Field 8 is the DURATION of the sighting, in seconds (a value of 600 thus represents 10 minutes).

Field 9 is the primary COLOUR of the object(s) seen

Field 10 is the number of WITNESSES

Field 11 is the SHAPE of the object(s) seen

Field 12 is the STRANGENESS of the report.

Field 13 is the RELIABILITY of the report.

Field 14 is the SOURCE of the report.

Field 15 is the EVALUATION of the case.

Field 16 includes any COMMENTS noted about the case.

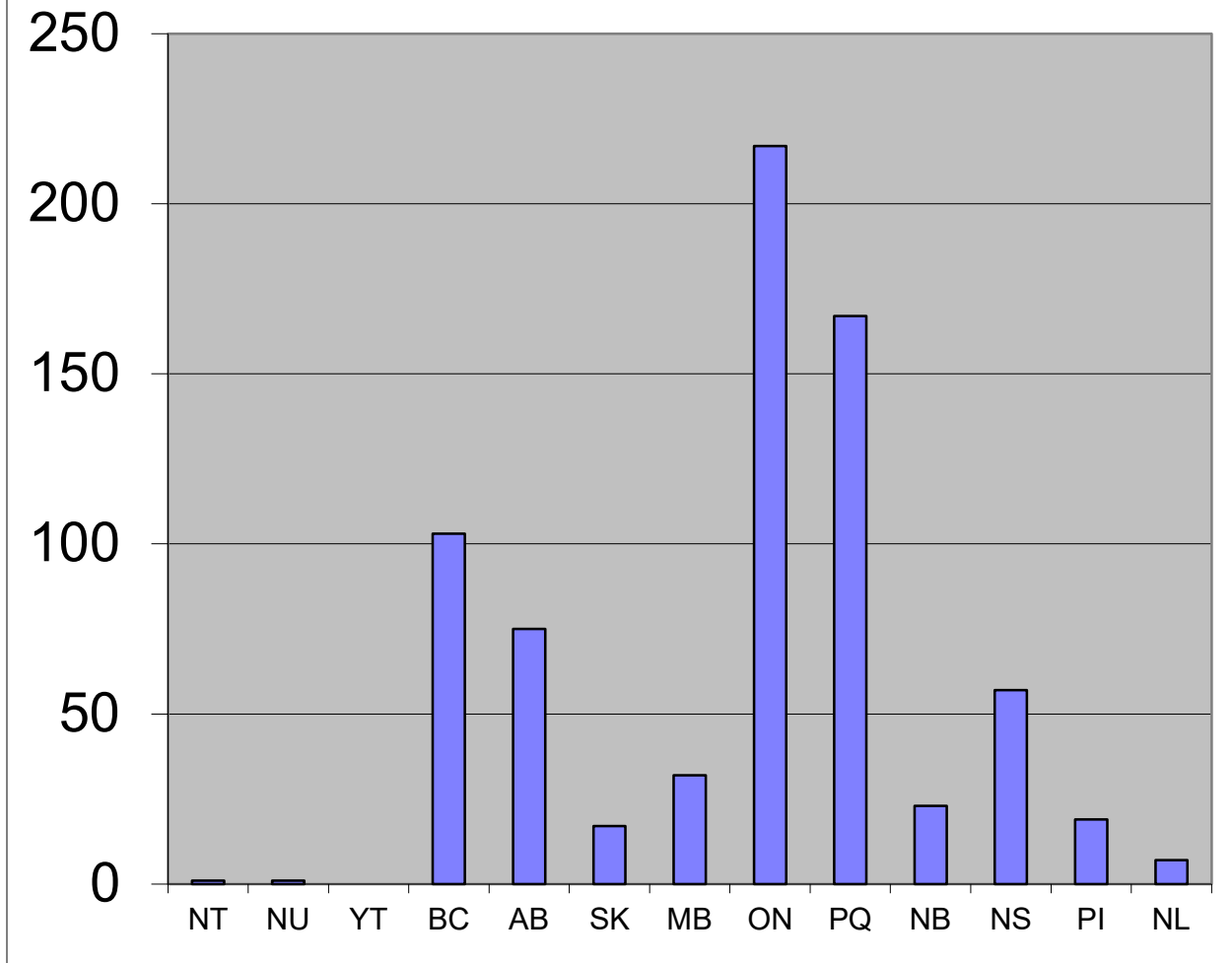
A detailed set of guidelines for coding the case information was provided to those working on the data.

Distribution of UFO reports across Canada

In 2021, Ontario led all Canadian provinces with 30 per cent of all Canadian UFO reports, unchanged from previous years. Ontario was followed by Quebec (23 per cent) and BC (14 per cent, down slightly from 17 per cent in 2020). Nova Scotia saw an increase in reports from five per cent to eight per cent of all Canadian cases reported.

All provinces and territories showed slight decreases in report numbers in 2021 compared with 2020, with the decrease less pronounced in the Maritimes.

Breakdown of 2021 Cases by Province



In addition, geographical names of UFO sighting locations were examined for trends. Many cities were found to have multiple reports, as noted. (Large metropolitan areas include their suburbs.)

Number of UFO Reports in Metropolitan Areas in 2021

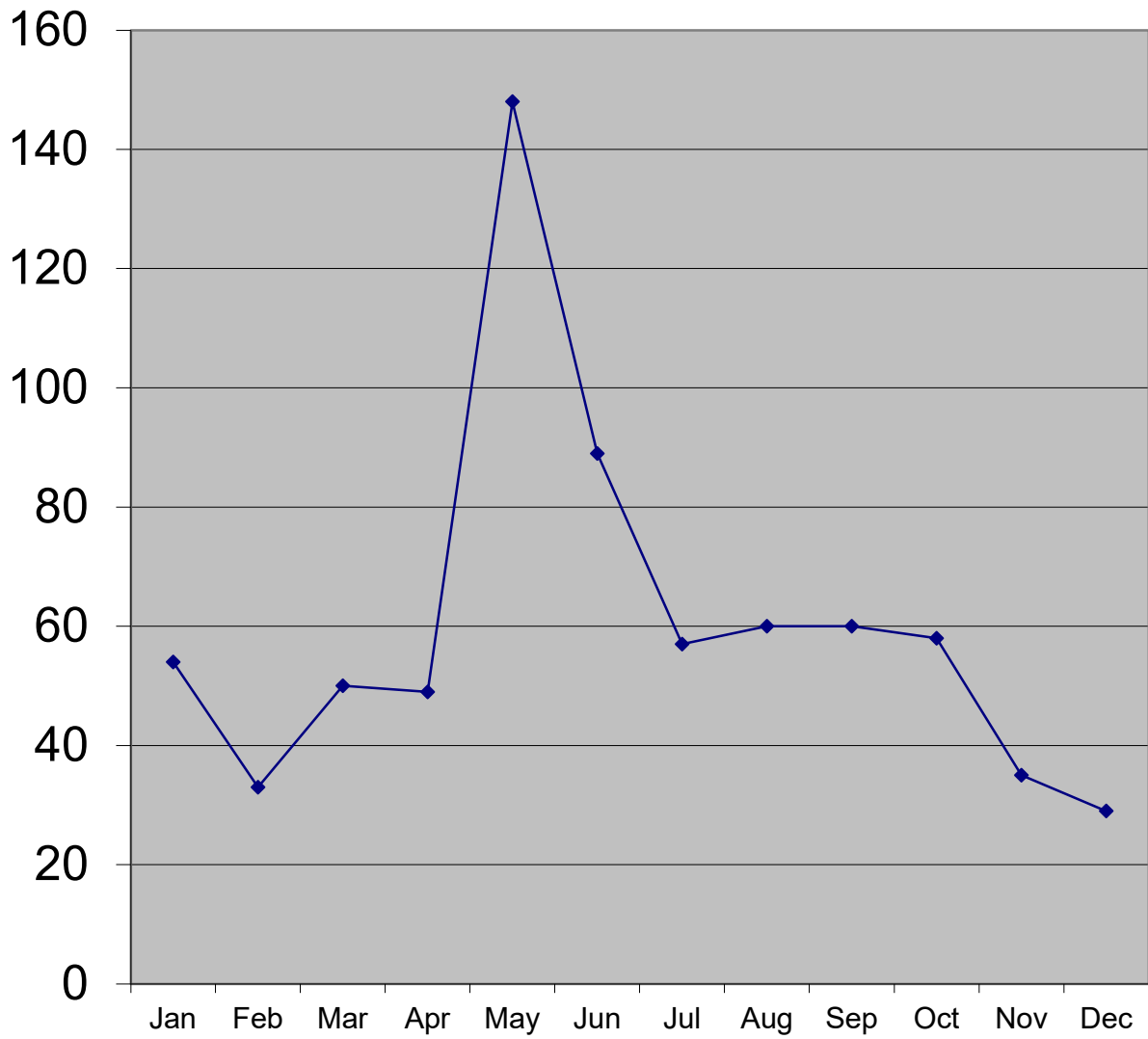
Metropolitan Areas

| | |
|-------------|----|
| Montreal | 46 |
| Toronto | 44 |
| Vancouver | 31 |
| Calgary | 30 |
| London | 18 |
| Edmonton | 15 |
| Hamilton | 14 |
| Winnipeg | 14 |
| Ottawa | 8 |
| Quebec City | 8 |

Monthly Trends in UFO Reports

Monthly breakdowns of reports during each year tend to show slightly different patterns. UFO reports are generally thought to peak in summer and are at minimum in winter, presumably due to the more pleasant observing conditions during the summer months, when more witnesses are outside. In Canada in 2021, the monthly trend was somewhat different from previous years, in that there was a shift of the monthly peak from summer to spring.

Breakdown of Cases by Month



UFO Report Types

An analysis by report type shows a similar breakdown to that found in previous years. The percentage of cases of a particular type remains roughly constant from year to year, with some variations. Most cases were Nocturnal Lights and Nocturnal Discs, which comprised more than 70 per cent of cases.

Less than three per cent of all reported UFO cases in 2021 were Close Encounters, emphasizing the reality that very few UFO cases involve anything other than distant objects seen in the sky. This is an important statistic, because the current popular interest in abductions and sensational UFO encounters is based not on the vast majority of UFO cases but on the very tiny fraction of cases which fall into the category of close encounters. Speculation on what aliens may or may not be doing in our airspace seems almost completely unconnected to the question of what are actually being reported as UFOs.

For those unfamiliar with the classifications, a summary follows:

NL (Nocturnal Light) - light source in night sky

ND (Nocturnal Disc) - light source in night sky that appears to have a definite shape

DD (Daylight Disc) - unknown object observed during daytime hours

C1 (Close Encounter of the First Kind) - ND or DD occurring within 200 metres of a witness

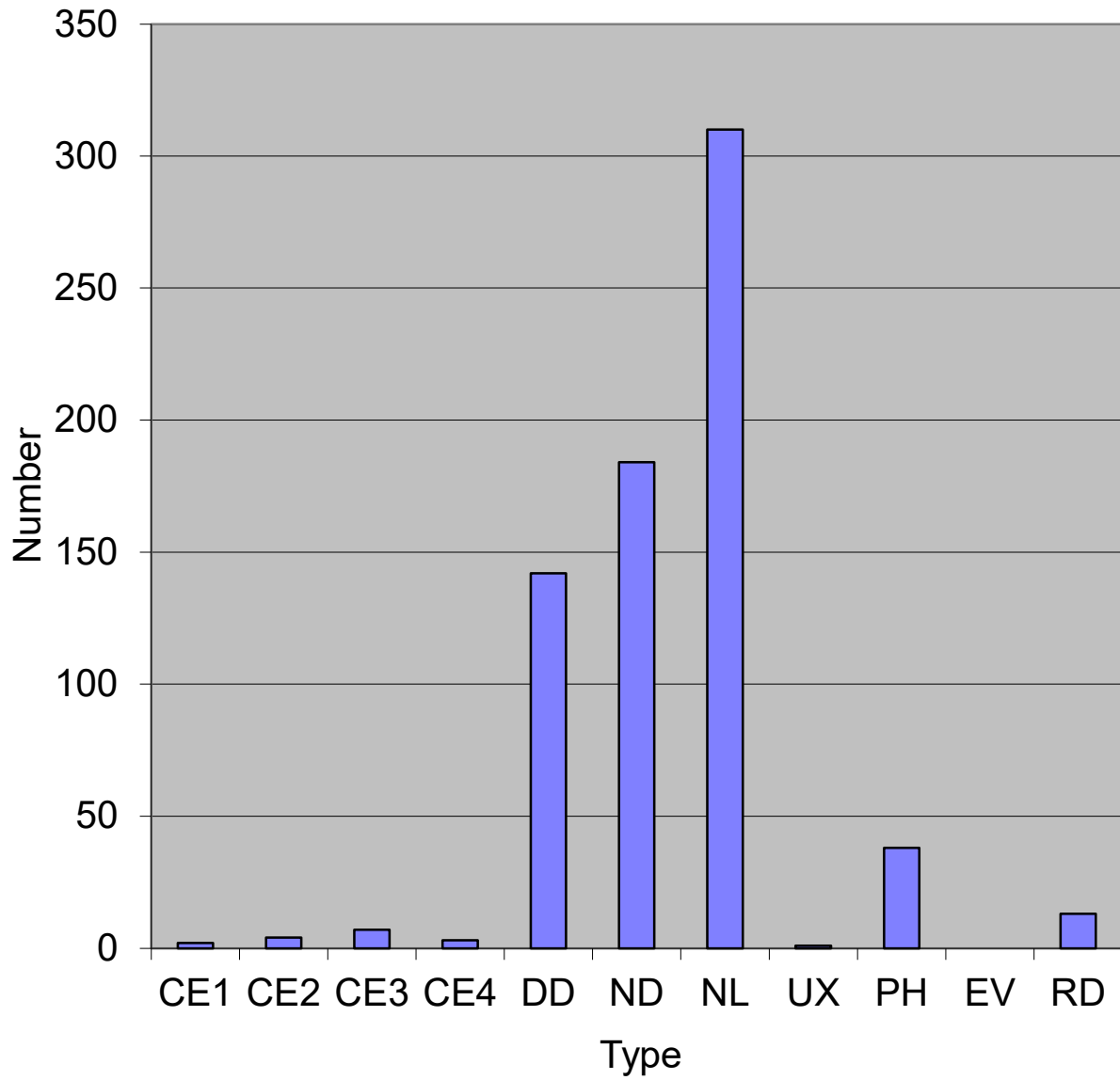
C2 (Close Encounter of the Second Kind) - C1 where physical effects left or noted

C3 (Close Encounter of the Third Kind) - C1 where figures/entities are encountered

C4 (Close Encounter of the Fourth Kind) - an alleged "abduction" or "contact" experience

Note: The category of Nocturnal Disc was created in the 1980s by UFOROM originally for differentiation of cases within its own report files, and has been adopted by many other groups worldwide.

Breakdown of 2021 Cases by Type



Other Report Types

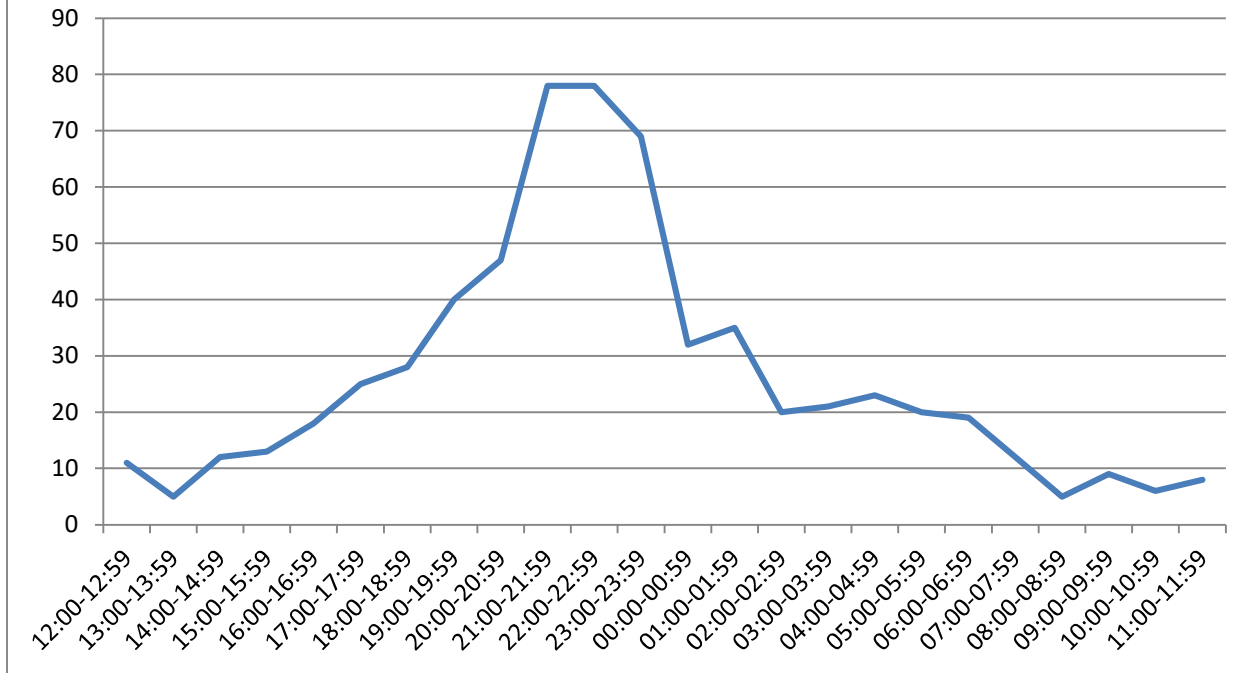
The category of PH indicates the sighting was entirely photographic, without any actual object seen visually. Many reports listed as NL or ND or DD may also have associated photos or video, so this should not be considered exclusive. However, about 30 per cent of all UFO reports are accompanied by photographs or videos (usually from cell phone cameras). This is one rejoinder to the complaint to there are no photos of UFOs, considering the abundance of cameras. Of course, the problem is not that there are no photos or videos of UFOs, but that there are so few good, high-quality, and information-rich useful photos of UFOs.

EV indicates a case in which physical evidence was observed (not necessarily related to any observed object) and RD is a case in which an object was detected with radar but not necessarily observed. UX cases are those in which anomalous phenomena are reported and believed by witnesses to be UFO-related, but no UFO was actually seen. These include reports of "odd sounds," observations of strange creatures, and dreams.

Hourly Distribution

The hourly distribution of cases has usually followed a similar pattern every year, with a peak at 2200 hours local and a trough around 0900 hours local. Since most UFOs are nocturnal lights, most sightings will occur during the evening hours. Since the number of possible observers drops off sharply near midnight, we would expect the hourly rate of UFO reports would vary with two factors: potential observers and darkness.

2021 Sightings by Time of Day



Duration

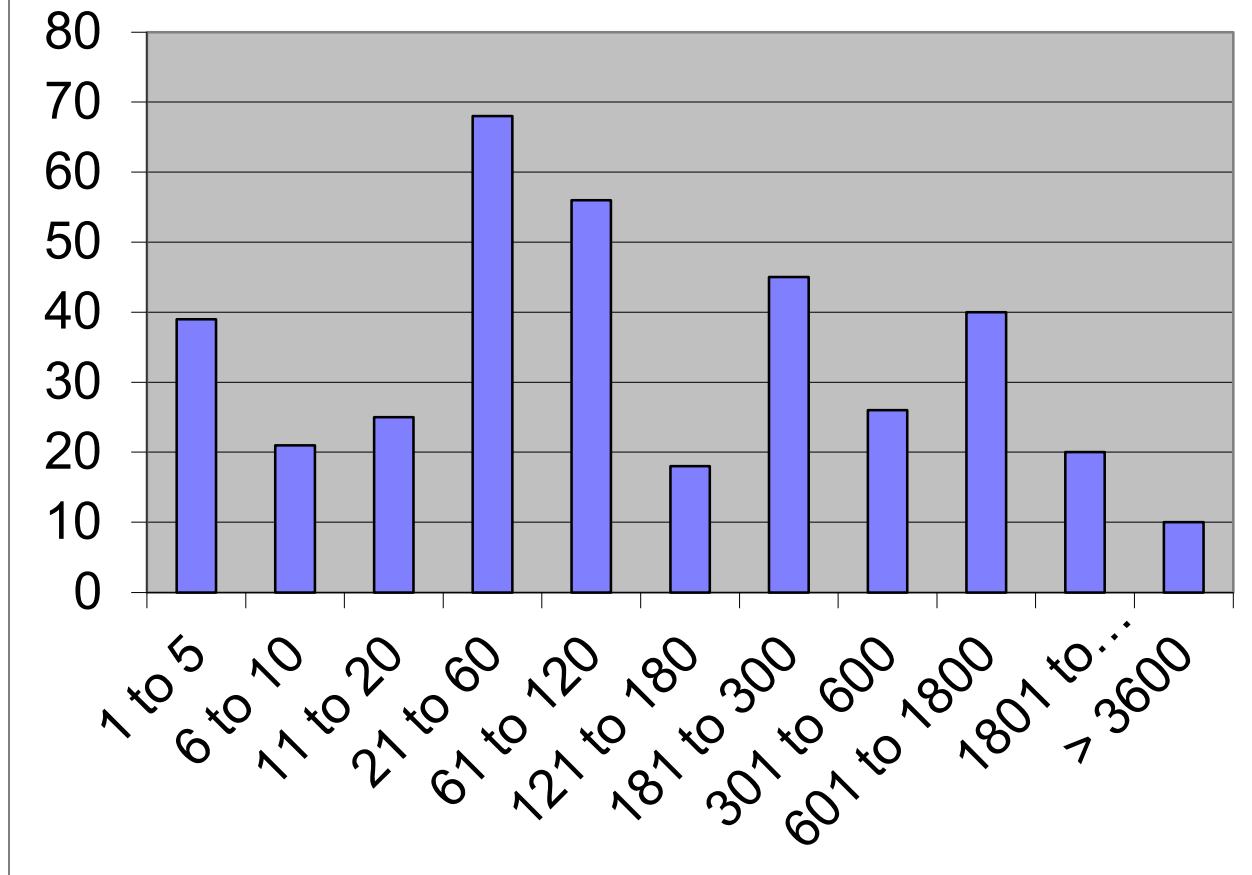
The category of Duration is interesting in that it represents the subjective length of time the UFO experience lasted. In other words, this is the length of time the sighting lasted *as estimated by the witness*. Naturally, these times are greatly suspect because it is known that most people tend to badly misjudge the flow of time.

Although a witness' estimate of "one hour" may be in error by several minutes, it is unlikely that the true duration would be, for example, one minute. Furthermore, there have been cases when a UFO was observed and clocked very accurately, so that we can be reasonably certain that UFO events can last considerable periods of time.

The average duration of UFO sightings in Canada in 2021 was about 13 minutes, down from 21 minutes in 2020.

The length of time an object is seen suggests some simple explanations for what was being observed by the witness. In fact, the duration of a sighting is one of the biggest clues to its explanation. Experience in studying UFO reports has shown us that short duration events are usually fireballs or bolides, and long duration events of an hour or more are very probably astronomical objects moving slowly with Earth's rotation. Long-duration sightings tend to occur in the early morning hours, from about midnight until 6:00 a.m.

Duration of 2021 Sightings



Colour

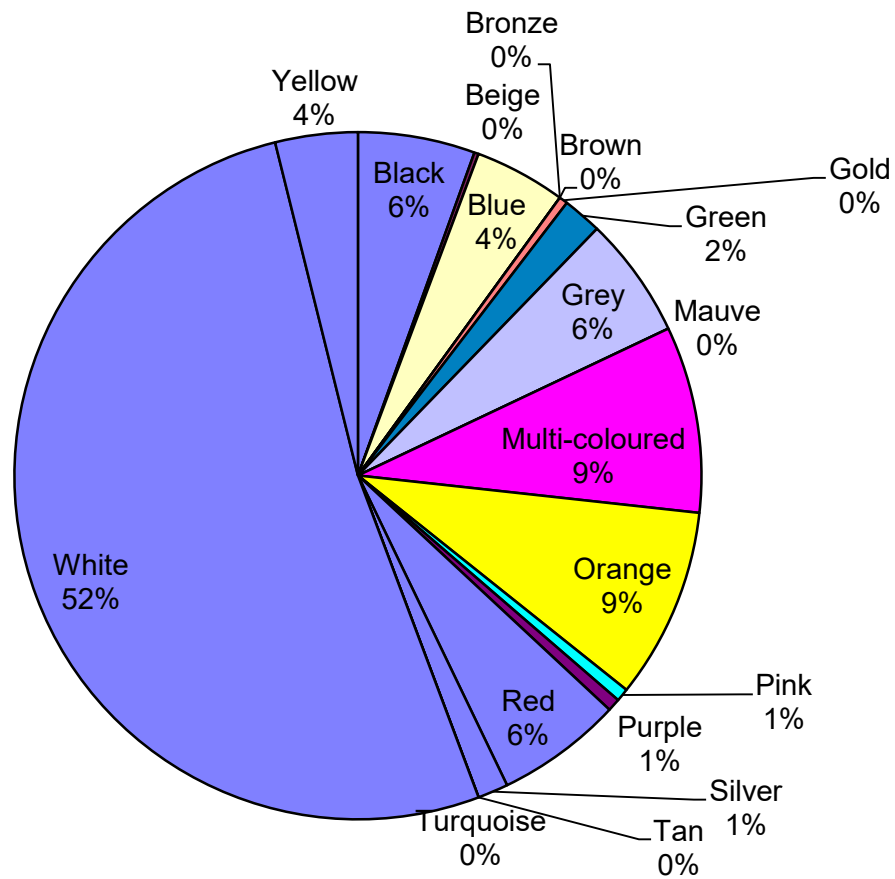
In cases where colours of an object were reported by witnesses, the most common colour in 2019 was white, at about 25 per cent of all cases where colour was mentioned by witnesses. In 2020, this percentage increased to 51 per cent, and in 2021 this edged upward to 52 per cent.

This result might be related to the abundance of Starlink-related reports, which were uniformly white starlike objects. The next most common colours were orange, multicoloured, and red. Since most UFOs are nocturnal starlike objects, the abundance of white objects is not surprising.

Colours such as red, orange, blue and green often are associated with bolides (fireballs). Orange is most often associated with the observation of a Chinese lanterns, the launching of which have been popular during the past decade or so.

The 'multicoloured' designation is problematic in that it literally covers a wide range of possibilities. This label has been used, for example, when witnesses described their UFOs as having white, red and green lights. Many of these are certainly stars or planets, which seem to flash a variety of colours when seen low on the horizon. Aircraft are also frequently described as having more than one colour of light, such as flashing coloured red and green wing lights. However, seen from a distance, aircraft can often be visible only as moving white lights.

Breakdown of 2021 Reports by Colour



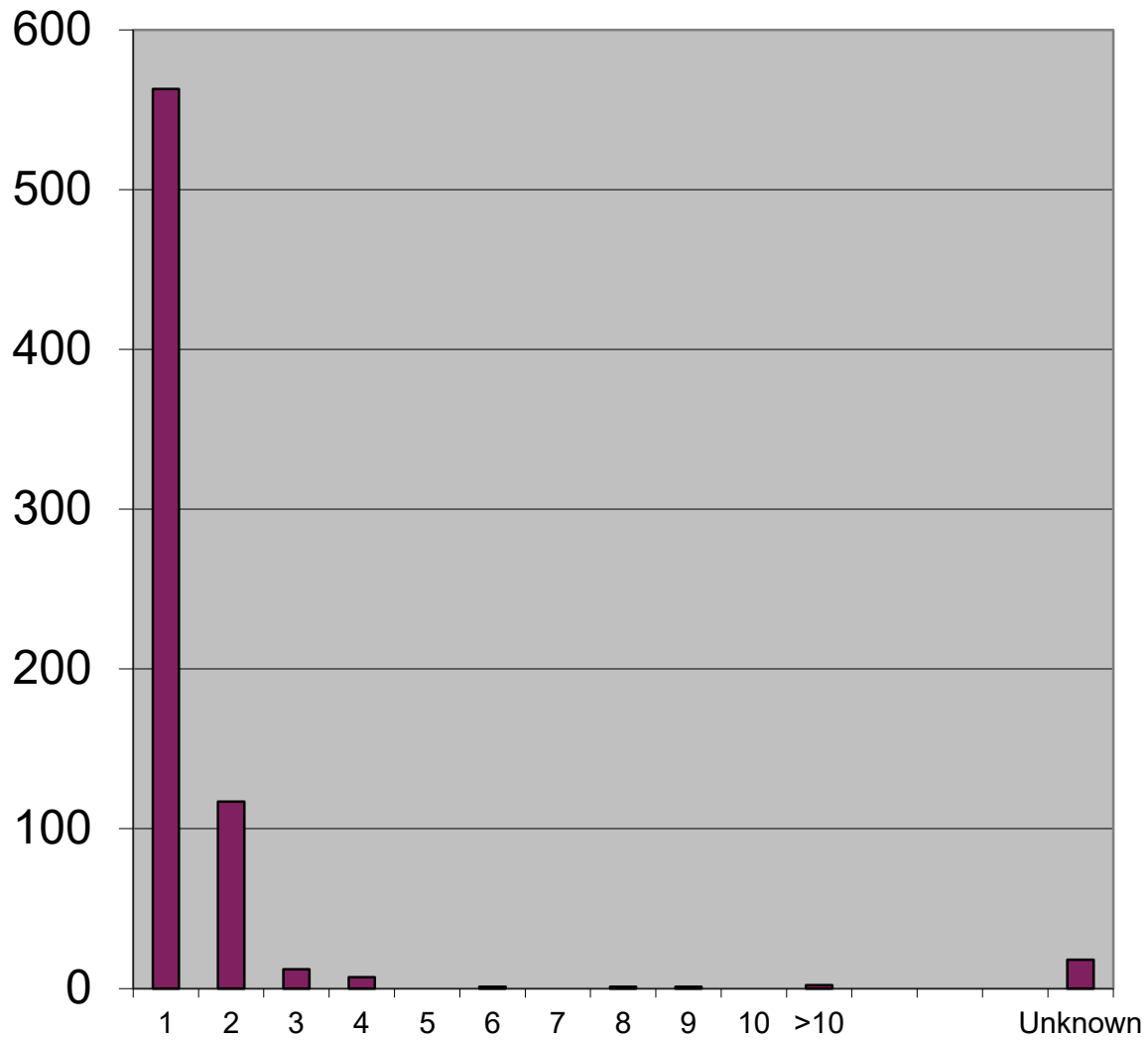
Witnesses

The average number of witnesses per case in 2021 was approximately 1.30, down slightly from 2020. This suggests that more reports in 2021 came from lone witnesses and may indicate that witnesses are becoming more confident in their sightings to report them without fear of ridicule or stigma. This value has been as high as 2.4 in 1996, indicating that a UFO experience often has more than one witness, and supports the contention that UFO sightings represent observations of real, physical phenomena, since there is usually at least one corroborator present to support the sighting.

We can then extrapolate the number of Canadians who had seen UFOs in 2021. Given the number of cases in 2021 as 722 and using 1.30 as the number of witnesses per case, we get a value suggesting that at least 939 Canadians saw UFOs in 2021.

The number is likely higher, as studies have shown that only about ten per cent of all UFO sightings are reported (most witnesses choose not to tell anyone, out of fear of ridicule or concern for their reputation). Multiplying by ten, this means it is probable that more than 9,000 Canadians saw UFOs in 2021, or about one in every 4,000 people.

Breakdown of 2021 Cases by # of Witnesses



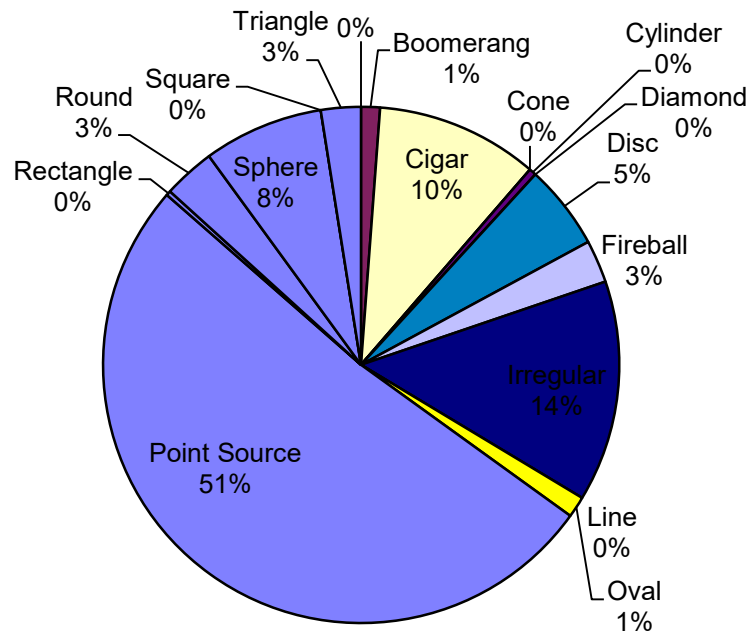
Shape

Witnesses' descriptions of the shapes of UFOs vary greatly. In 2021, like other years, most reported UFOs were simply "point sources"—that is, "starlike" objects or distant lights. The classic "flying saucer" or disc-shaped object was reported in 36 cases in 2021 (about five per cent), and "triangles" were reported in only 17 cases in 2021.

The shape of a perceived object depends on many factors such as the witness' own visual acuity, the angle of viewing, the distance of viewing and the witness' own biases and descriptive abilities. Nevertheless, in combination with other case data such as duration, shape can be a good clue towards a UFO's possible explanation.

One recurring problem is the description by a witness of a distant light as an "orb," implying a spherical shape. The term "orb" has also been adopted by many in ufology who infer that an orb is something mysterious and distinct from a simple light. Upon interviewing witnesses who describe orbs, however, it is clear they only observed a distant light, and their personal belief in alien visitation drove them to label it as something unexplainable.

Shape - 2021 Survey



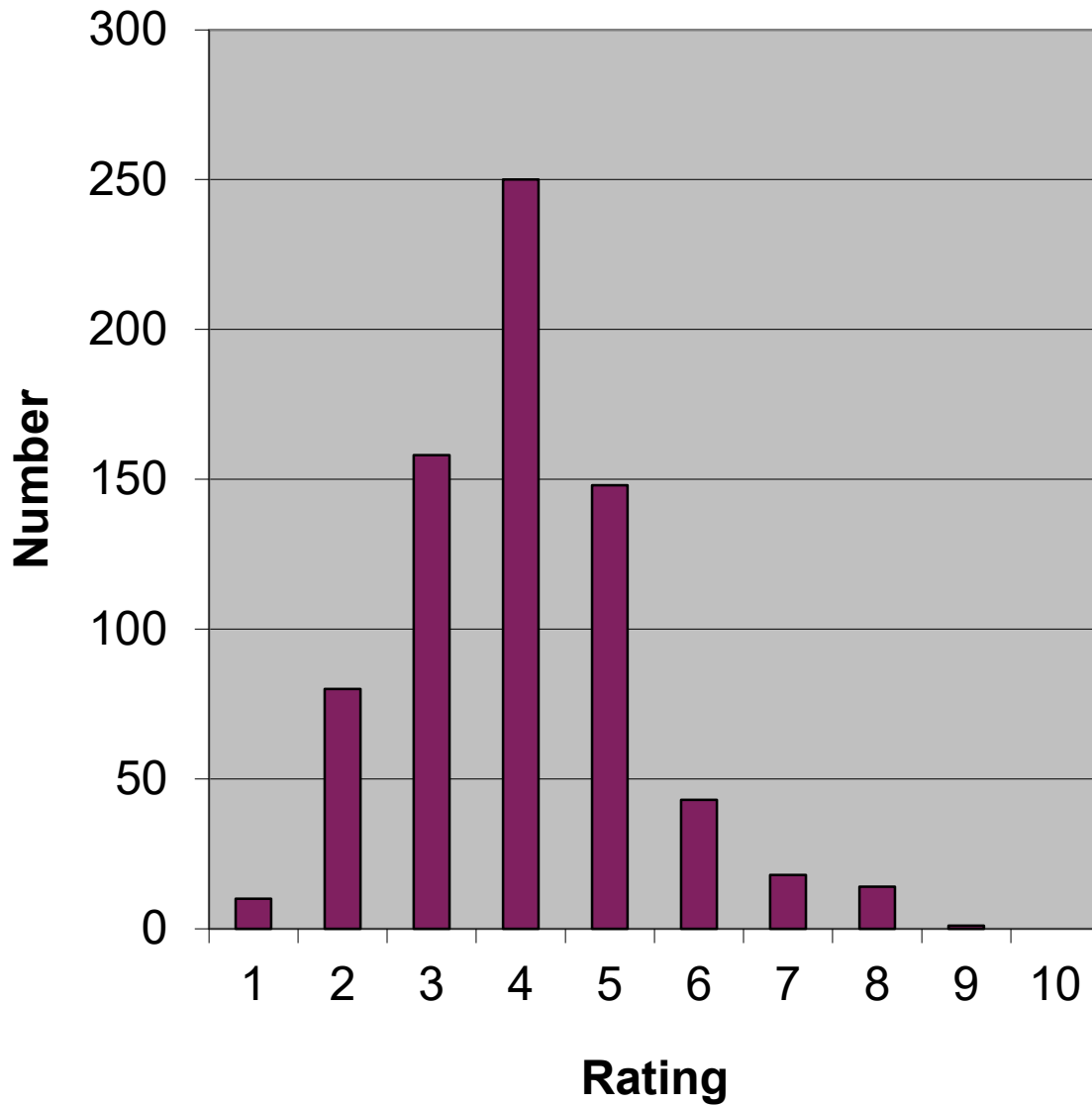
Strangeness

The assigning of a Strangeness rating to a UFO report is based on a classification adopted by researchers who noted that the inclusion of a subjective evaluation of the degree to which a particular case is in itself unusual might yield some insight into the data. For example, the observation of a single, stationary, starlike light in the sky, seen for several hours, is not particularly unusual and might likely have a prosaic explanation such as that of a star or planet. On the other hand, a detailed observation of a saucer-shaped object which glides slowly away from a witness after an encounter with grey-skinned aliens would be considered highly strange. A Strangeness rating is assigned during the data entry process, based on the given information about each case. It is subjective, but based on the general criteria noted above.

The numbers of UFO reports according to a strangeness rating show an inverse relationship such that the higher the strangeness rating, the fewer reports. The one exception to this relationship occurs in the case of very low strangeness cases, which are relatively few in number compared to those of moderate strangeness. It is suggested this is the case because in order for an observation to be considered a UFO, it must usually rise above an ad hoc level of strangeness, otherwise it would not be considered strange at all.

The average strangeness rating for UFO reports during 2021 was about 4.0, where 1 is considered not strange at all and 9 is considered exceptionally unusual. This was down slightly from 2020.

Breakdown of 2021 Cases by Strangeness



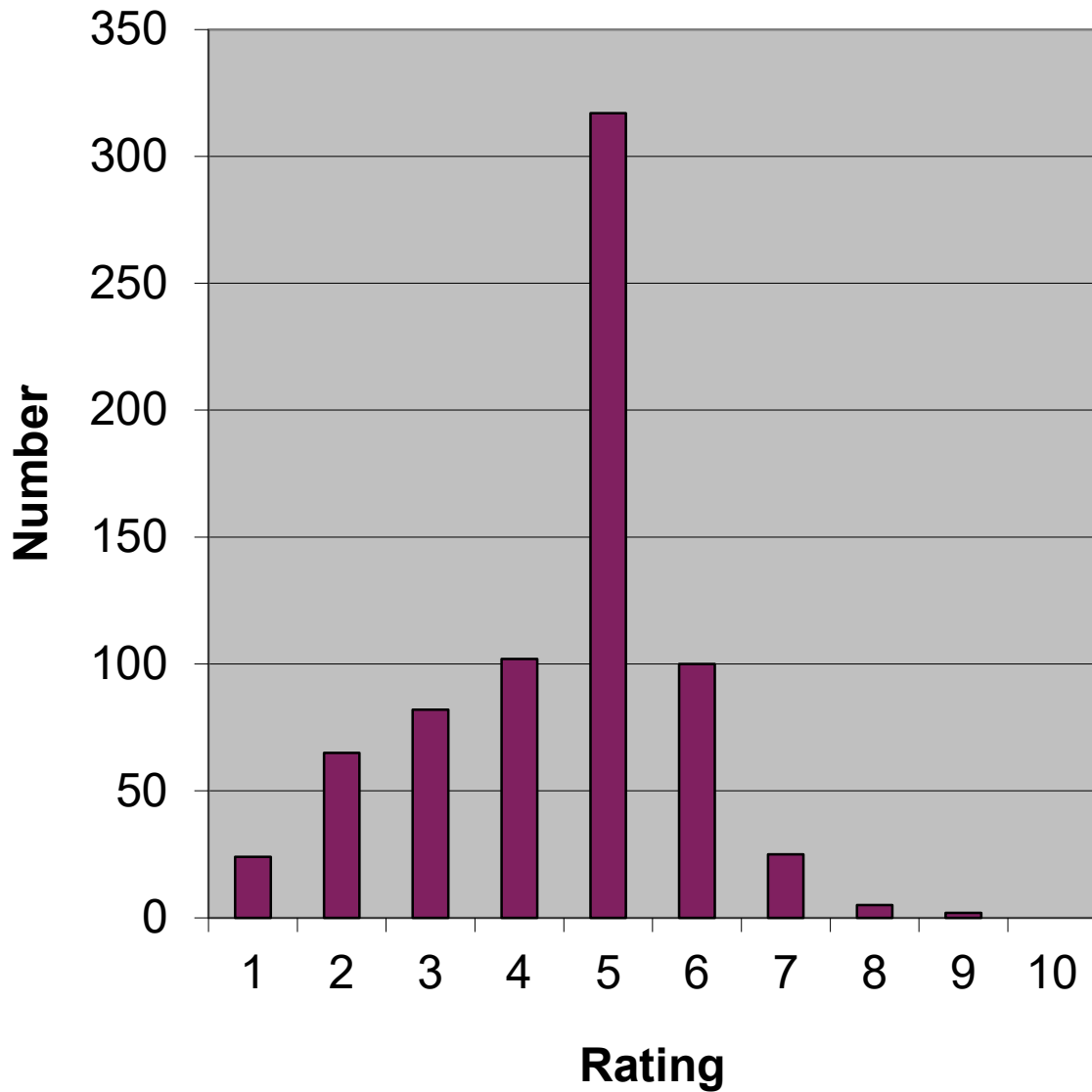
Reliability

The average Reliability rating of Canadian UFO reports in 2021 was less than 5, meaning that most cases had minimal investigation, likely only a report form filled out by a witness, and without extensive supporting documentation or investigation.

Higher reliability cases include actual interviews with witnesses, a detailed case investigation, multiple witnesses, supporting documentation and other evidence. Since data for many cases are taken from websites and second-hand postings, or in fact self-postings, there is usually no significant investigation of UFO sightings. Well-investigated cases seem to comprise only a small fraction of all UFO data, a fact that makes UFO case data have limited value.

Reliability and Strangeness ratings tend to vary in classic bell-shaped curves. In other words, there are very few cases which were both highly unusual and well-reported. Most cases are of medium strangeness and medium reliability. These are the “high-quality unknowns” which will be discussed later. However, there are also very few low-strangeness cases with low reliability. Low-strangeness cases, therefore, tend to be well-reported and probably have explanations.

Breakdown of 2021 Cases by Reliability



Sources

UFO data used in this study were supplied by many different groups, organizations, official agencies and private individuals. Since this annual survey began in the late 1980s, more and more cases have been obtained and received via the Internet.

In 2021, about 28 per cent of Canadian cases in were reported to the large organization known as the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON), which has an online reporting system. This was as high as 41 per cent in 2018 and an all-time high of 44 per cent in 2009. L'Association québécoise d'ufologie (AQU) provided 11 per cent of the 2021 case data. About 10 per cent of the total cases were obtained through the National UFO Reporting Center in the USA, about half as many as in 2020. Like MUFON, both AQU and NUFORC have toll-free telephone numbers for reporting UFOs and a large sightings list created through voluntary submission of online report forms by witnesses.

About 17 per cent of all UFO sightings reported in 2021 were sent directly to Ufology Research. About four per cent of all cases came as a result of information obtained through government sources such as Transport Canada and the Department of National Defence.

In 2021, a significant trend was an increase in UFO sightings reported on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, and Youtube. More than 23 per cent of sightings reported by witnesses in 2021 were noted on these sites, in interest groups or general posts. Because of the difficulty in verifying information posted on social media, this likely resulted in lower Reliability ratings.

It should be noted that the preparation of this Survey is becoming quite challenging. Few UFO investigators or researchers actually submit case directly data to UFOROM, despite requests, requiring considerable searching of online sources. And, although many sites post information about UFO sightings, very little actual UFO investigation is being conducted. In fact, it could be said that the science of good and thorough UFO investigation has nearly become extinct, if it existed at all. This does not bode well for an area of study that is under constant criticism by debunkers wishing to prove the unscientific nature of the subject.

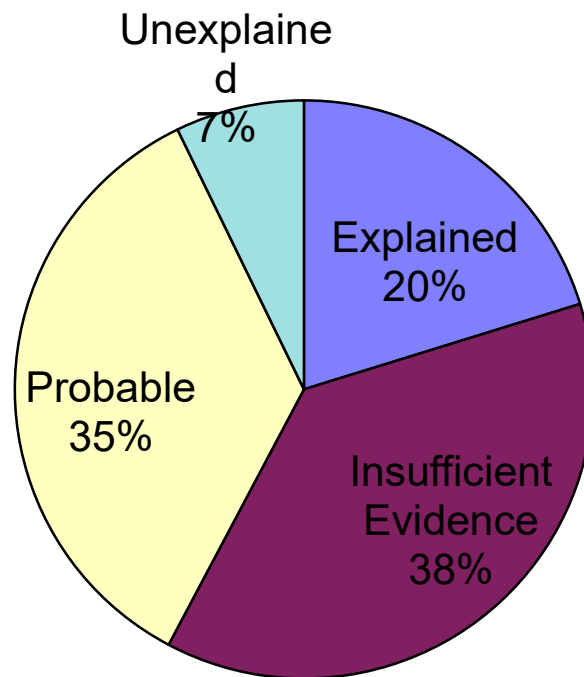
Conclusion/Evaluation

There are four operative categories in the Canadian UFO Survey: Explained, Insufficient Information, Possible or Probable Explanation, and Unknown (or Unexplained). It is important to note that a classification of Unknown does not imply that an alien spacecraft or mysterious natural phenomenon was observed; no such interpretation can be made with certainty, based solely on the given data.

The breakdown by Conclusion for 2021 UFO reports showed the percentage of unexplained cases at seven per cent of the total, about the same as in most years. The percentage of cases with definite explanations is about 20 per cent.

It is also important to note that a high number of Unexplained cases in a given year does not mean those cases are necessarily alien spacecraft. Many Unexplained cases have low reliability or Strangeness, and some might be Unexplained but could be objects such as drones or military projects for which we do not have full data but enough to suggest they are unusual.

Breakdown of 2021 Reports by Conclusion



The evaluation of UFO reports has both subjective and quantitative components.

E (Explained) is used when it can be determined with certainty that the UFO seen was a known object, such as a Chinese Lantern, a photographic defect, re-entering satellite, or astronomical object.

I (Insufficient Information) is used if there is information lacking that could help identify the UFO. A lack of a definite date or location is insufficient information, for example.

P (Possible or Probable Explanation) is used if the description of the observed UFO fits well with a prosaic explanation or a conventional object.

U (Unknown or Unexplained) is used if all data points are available, if the description and behaviour of the UFO do not easily conform to that of a conventional object. If there is supporting documentation and there has been some investigation to rule out a prosaic explanation, this increases the likelihood of coding the case as an Unknown.

It is important to note that a classification of Unknown does not imply that an alien spacecraft or mysterious natural phenomenon was observed; no such interpretation can be made with certainty, based solely on the given data. Evaluation reflects a subjective evaluation by researchers who question whether a particular report has enough information to consider it as having a possible explanation or if there is simply not enough information to make that judgement. This situation has likely arisen because very few UFO sightings are ever fully investigated, as most are simply reported and published online, often without any follow-up or investigation possible. An Evaluation is made subjectively by either or both the contributing investigators and the compilers of this study. The category of Unknown is adopted if there is extensive information or data available and/or if the contributed data or case report contains enough information such that a conventional explanation cannot be satisfactorily proposed. This does not mean that the case will never be explained, but only that a viable explanation is not immediately obvious.

The level and quality of UFO report investigation varies because there are no explicit and rigorous standards for UFO investigation. Investigators who are “believers” might be inclined to consider most UFO sightings as mysterious, whereas those with more of a skeptical predisposition might tend to subconsciously (or consciously) reduce the Unknowns in their files.