

# A Living Breathing Hoax

A while ago, I decided to write a series within my blog about animals, my favorite things. I just can't find enough time to learn about animals, and I love sharing knowledge about their incredible attributes. Here is chapter two in my Interesting Animals series. To read chapter one about a scaly mammal called the pangolin, [click here](#).

For chapter two, I chose to focus on the duck-billed platypus; an animal who is so strange looking that people thought it to be a hoax when it was first discovered in 1798.

The platypus is one of 3-5 species (depending on the source – animal knowledge is very differential) of monotremes or egg-laying mammals. I know, at one point we were all taught that one of the characteristics of mammals is that they give birth to live young, but that is not the case. Monotremes lay eggs, and the platypus join echidnas (spiny anteaters) in this animal order. The platypus is found in Australia – seems like they have all the cool animals, doesn't it? I just wish they weren't so stingy with their animals. I know they stopped loaning out the Tasmanian Devil years ago, and now that the last one died (it resided in Fort Wayne Indiana until its death – I could kick myself for not making the less than hour trip over there to see it while it was alive), the only place to see them is in Australia. The same goes for the platypus. I've visited many zoos, and I've never seen a live platypus. A quick check on the internet reveals that they are only found in Australian zoos.

But anyway, aside from being an aquatic (with water-repellent fur), egg-laying mammal, another cool thing about the platypus is that the males are actually poisonous. Both genders have a spur on their left foot, but the males' spur produces enough venom to really hurt a human being. Here is a picture of the duck-billed platypus – note the soft, leathery duck-bill which

is actually used by the animal to sense the electric fields caused by its moving prey (feeds on shrimp, fish eggs, small fish, and aquatic invertebrates found in streams and lakes).



Easy to see how this duck-billed, beaver-tailed, otter-footed, egg-laying mammal was once thought to be an elaborate man-made fraud, huh?

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## Psychic or Fraud?

I don't really believe in psychics. I believe that some people may have a gift where they are psychologically in tune with others and / or nature; leading them to be able to predict happenings or events with some accuracy. For

instance, I used to be able to tell who was calling when our phone was ringing (in the days before caller ID). It's not that people called us at regular times or intervals, but I could just "feel" who was on the other end of the line. Not that I think I'm psychic or anything; I think I just learned the behavior patterns of the people who called our house. So I believe that people can have what could be called psychic abilities, especially if they practice and hone their skills, but I don't believe anyone can see the future or anything like that. And I don't believe the self-proclaimed psychic Sylvia Browne possesses any special skills other than the abilities to defraud and manipulate people, if you want to call those things abilities.

While flipping channels and feeding the baby the other day, I came across the Montel Williams show. Apparently Montel is on his way out after 17 years of being on the air. During the episode the other day, he got teary-eyed as he bid his weekly guest Sylvia Browne good-bye. It got me to thinking; does Montel believe that Sylvia is psychic, or did he just like his audience's reception of her? After a few internet searches on wikipedia.com and youtube.com, I was armed with evidence that Sylvia Browne is a fraud (not that I really needed any, but I found plenty anyway). Here is the first example where Sylvia tries to tell a grieving woman that her missing boyfriend is in water. The woman is confused because her boyfriend was a fireman killed in the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, and no trace of him was ever found. Watch as Sylvia tries to cover her tracks, backed up by Montel, I might add, with some lame excuse about how the boyfriend might have drowned when they were extinguishing the fire at the World Trade Center. What?!? That doesn't even make sense!

Not only that, but she was on Larry King Live a mere 8 days before the September 11 attacks and didn't say a word about the impending doom. After the attacks, she claimed that she had dreams full of fire in the weeks before the attacks – yet she failed to mention such premonitions on her September 3, 2001 appearance on Larry King!

One more example is the case of Shawn Hornbeck, a preteen who went missing in 2002. Sylvia Browne told Shawn's devastated parents that he was abducted by a dark man with dreadlocks and murdered, and she also provided details about where they could find his body. Four and a half years after his abduction, Shawn was found with Michael Devlin, a white man who had abducted Shawn – a far cry from the so-called "dark man with dreadlocks" who "murdered" him. In this case, it's a very good thing she was wrong – those parents got their son back alive, but one can only imagine the pain they felt when this so-called psychic told them that their son was dead.

There are plenty more examples of this woman's fraudulent behavior – I'm just not going to waste my time writing them nor your time reading them. If you want to see more, go to youtube.com and do a search for "Sylvia Browne". For fun, you can add words like, "wrong", "fraud", or "lie" to your search and see what you come up with. There is also an interesting site called [stopsylviabrowne.com](http://stopsylviabrowne.com) that's maintained by one of her biggest opponents. He talks about his experience encountering Sylvia, how she hired a private detective to research him, and his experience at one of her live shows.

Well, enough of that, like I said, I consider the woman a fraud, therefore she's not worth any more of our time to go through the hundreds of instances that prove she is full of BS. I don't know how she can live with herself when she toys with the emotions of the grief-stricken. I suppose she could tell herself that she is helping to give them closure, but if that's the case, I would say to her, "Stop fooling yourself lady, you're causing more harm than good!"