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WORCESTERSHIRE THE NEW LOCH NESS?

On-going sightings of mysterious black beasts throughout Worcestershire are giving the tourism industry a boost, according to Destination Worcestershire, the official destination marketing partnership promoting tourism in the county. It is currently running the Worcestershire Welcome Awards and has been told by B&Bs, hostelrys and hotels that people are increasingly visiting the county specifically on the trail of the beasts.

The most recent sighting was this March, as reported by the Worcester News, when two local men walking their dogs spotted a panther-like creature lurking in undergrowth on the outskirts of the city.

The county is one of the UK's top hot spots for mystery sightings – in 2006, a survey compiled by the British Big Cats Society, listed nearly 50 sightings in the area in a single year alone.

Other evidence has also been found to substantiate the story including the imprint of a giant paw on a car in a local car park. The beasts are described as jet black, at least four foot in length, with flashing eyes and long tails. However, there have been no reports of anyone being hurt by the creatures.

Various hypotheses have been mooted about the beasts – some believe they could be large feral cats and others that they are a family of panthers. There is also the suggestion they are descended from ancient cat-like animals called Nimvraids, or false sabre-tooth cats, likened to the modern-day lynx.

The county is considering whether there are ways to develop specific activities for people wanting to investigate the beasts of Worcestershire. Suggestions have included trails and even a dedicated web site linked to www.visitworcestershire.org. There is also talk of a visit to Loch Ness by a delegation from the county's tourism industry to find out how to maximize the opportunity.

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For information on Worcestershire, visit www.visitworcestershire.org

Destination Worcestershire is the official public/private partnership promoting the county of Worcestershire as a tourist destination. For more information including What's On, Where to Stay, and places to visit go to : www.visitworcestershire.org .