

Monster pig' buzz, skepticism grow.
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Photo Caption

Jamison Stone shows the skull of the 1,051-pound hog he killed May 3. Next to it is the skull of an average-sized hog. Photo: Stephen Gross/The Anniston Star

It's been exactly a week since the story of the 1,000-plus-pound hog killed in Delta by an 11-year-old boy first appeared in The Star.

And the buzz has done nothing but intensify.

From CNN all the way to People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, the story of Jamison Stone and his harvest of what has become known as “monster pig” has been met with awe, skepticism, congratulations and criticism.

The latest round of skepticism came from a Web site, stinkyjournalism.org, which claims that photos showing Stone and others with the pig are fake and that news organizations that have published the photos have been duped.

Stinky Journalism cites “resident experts” in the computer program Photoshop, trick photography techniques and a retired New York University physics professor with mathematical equations to back up its claims.

On the front page of Fox New's Web site Tuesday night, the news outlet — citing Stinky Journalism — had a prominent link to its story displayed with the legendary photo and the headline: “Is this photo kosher?”

But the family, the guides on the May 3 hunting trip and even the taxidermist stand firmly beside their claims.

“Those pictures were taken in a matter of minutes,” Mike Stone, Jamison's father, said. “We were just trying to beat daylight.”

“There were no thoughts of trying to stand anywhere or do anything to make this pig look any bigger.”

Added Keith O’Neal, a guide on the hunt, “There was no need to make him look any bigger.”

Despite the eyewitness accounts of those on the hunt and even the accounts of the taxidermist, Jerry Cunningham, Stinky Journalism’s Rhonda Roland Shearer writes that this story isn’t what it seems.

“Evidence collected by Stinky Journalism indicates that the photos, which ran on televisions and newspapers throughout the world, are not the straightforward snapshots they seem — but fakes,” she writes in her online story.

Shearer, director of the Art Science Research Laboratory based in New York, spoke to The Star in a telephone interview Tuesday.

“What I’m saying is that the photos have been altered, and that is really the sensation of the whole story,” she said.

The Stones had spoken with Shearer and were aware of the existence of her story. However, on Tuesday evening, the story on the site was no longer accessible. When attempting to view the story — and other pages on the site — all that appeared was a message: “Warning: Host ‘data.asrlab.org’ is blocked because of many connection errors.”

The Stones were in Oxford on Tuesday and had the skull on hand when interviewed by a reporter at Outback Steakhouse. Mike Stone said CNN had also sent a video crew to film the hog’s skull.

The family’s meal with the taxidermist and the guides and friends was a brief break from a whirlwind week of media coverage.

Since the story was reported in The Star, it has been covered by the Associated Press and the Fox News Web site, among others. The Stones also appeared live in studio Tuesday on CNN’s American Morning.

“Never in a million years did we think we’d be going on any of these big shows,” Mike Stone said.

Whether or not it was Shearer’s story, NBC’s The Today Show, however, had second thoughts about putting the Stones on the air. With the father and son slated to appear on the show Tuesday morning, producers at Today pulled the plug on the story with the Stones on the ground in New York City.

“We were interested in this story and having Mr. Stone and his family on Today, but as we investigated further, the question of its validity arose, and we decided against the interview,” NBC Universal public relations contact Lauren Kapp wrote in an e-mail.

Kapp said NBC is still considering the Stones for an interview.

O’Neal and fellow guide Chris Williams, operators of Southeastern Trophy Hunters, said they knew the harvest of the pig alone would draw some attention, but Jamison Stone doing the harvest moved the story move to a new level.

“We knew it was going to be something significant because of the sheer size,” O’Neal said. “... The fact that an 11-year-old did it with a pistol, that’s what perpetuated it and has kept it going.”

O’Neal and Williams went on to say that a lot of this skepticism might have never happened. They had invited television stations to come with them on the hunt, but none showed up.

Mike Stone indicated that there is video of the hunt, but would not release it for some time. He said he wants the hype and backlash directed at Jamison Stone, who has not yet reached high school, to die down. The negativity includes death threats directed at his family, he said.

Mike Stone has also been targeted by PETA. A press release for the organization dated May 28 says Mike Stone has been named “Worst Dad in the Country.”

“Mike Stone will receive a framed certificate — PETA’s first-ever ‘worst parent’ award — which reads, ‘Presented to Mike Stone for not only teaching his son how to kill but also doing further harm by showing him how to make animals suffer,’” according to the group’s Web site.

Cunningham, owner and operator of Jerry’s Taxidermy and the taxidermist handling the hog’s remains, said he’s also amazed by national attention this story has drawn.

“I did three radio interviews today,” he said. “And I’m only the taxidermist.”

Bran Strickland's Hog Blog (<http://starhogblog.blogspot.com>)

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