

## **America Under Siege? 'Creepy' Clown Reports and Hoaxes Keep Coming**

It's a menace stalking America — a menace called "clowning."

In something like a dog chasing its tail, more clowns are being sighted across the country as news organizations have chronicled sightings of clowns — invariably described as "creepy."

So many, in fact, that the website Atlas Obscura has launched a useful interactive map to help you keep track of them.

In a widely cited survey, the polling firm Rasmussen reported in 2014 that 43 percent of Americans "don't like" clowns. More recently, the annual Chapman University Survey of American Fears found that clowns were a cause of significant anxiety for 6.8 percent of Americans in 2015.

It's not as if the fears are anything new — think of Batman's nemesis the Joker and serial killer John Wayne Gacy, the "Killer Clown," after all — but the recent wave of creepy clown sightings appears to be a form of what cognitive scientists call confirmation bias — the likelihood of noticing information that tends to support your preconceptions over information that tends to contradict it.

In a new book, appropriately titled "Bad Clowns," urban legend debunker Benjamin Radford finds that there are only about a dozen confirmed accounts of actual evil clowns on record.

"Statistically you'd be more likely to win the lottery than to encounter an evil person who also happens to be a clown," writes Radford, a regular contributor to Snopes.com, the handy site that investigates urban legends.

(In just the past week, Snopes has published eight articles debunking evil clown reports.) It's a slander that has put real, make-'em-laugh clowns and their defenders on the defensive.

BY: ALEX JOHNSON