At some point we have all wished that we could have a dragon to train; a unicorn to ride or a phoenix to hatch from a pile of ashes, but not so long ago people believed they actually could - ridiculous right?!

Carl Linnaeus, however, was not convinced and nor was he easily fooled.

One of the most famous mythical animals was the Hydra; a ferocious seven headed snake. Linnaeus travelled to see the only known, dead, but very well preserved specimen, owned by the mayor of Hamburg. On close inspection of the animal he realised that it was a fake: its' jaws and claws belonged to a weasel and its skin to a snake all of which had been carefully glued together.

After confirming the Hydra was a fraud, Linnaeus had to quickly leave town that night, as the mayor wanted him dead for making his Hydra a worthless arts and craft project made by some monks.

Linnaeus was able to spot a fake creature because with the help of many others, he had developed a system that grouped similar looking living things together. He would then give these groups names like Panthera, which includes lions, tigers, jaguars and leopards because they all have similar looking skulls. Some groups of animals look much more alike than others, such as bats.

Bats are part of a group called Chiroptera meaning “hand wing”. They are given this name because their fingers form the bones of their wings, which kind of means, when they’re in flight, they’re constantly waving good bye.

Living things can also be grouped together based on the food that they eat. Carnivora is a group of animals that only eat meat such as lions, polar bears and domestic cats. So, if these mythical animals, the dragon, unicorn, phoenix and hydra could not fit into an existing group of animals to which they were similar, Linnaeus began to doubt whether or not they were real.

Linnaeus created a group for mythical animals, like the Hydra, that he called Animalia Paradoxa, which just means odd animals. He did this because these odd creatures did not fit into any of the existing groups that he had already established. And because he wanted to see them in person before accepting that they were real.

With this in mind, if you’re thinking of discovering, and by discovering I mean making up a mythical animal, make sure it fits into one of the groups that already exist before you go around telling everyone - and making yourself look like the foolish mayor of Hamburg.