

Beat: Health

Escaped python that killed 2 Canadian children put down

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USPA News - An African rock python that killed two young children after escaping from its enclosure at a reptile store in eastern Canada has been put down, police said on Tuesday as local officials indicated that the snake may have been owned illegally. The two young children, identified as 4-year-old Noah Barthe and 6-year-old brother Connor Barthe, were found dead at around 6:30 a.m. local time on Monday in the living room of an apartment above a reptile store in Campbellton, a city in the eastern province of New Brunswick.

They had been sleeping over at a friend, who lives above the store. Constable Jullie Rogers-Marsh, of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), said the store owner captured the snake which is believed to have strangled the boys as they slept in the apartment. The snake was then turned over to the RCMP and put down by a government veterinarian on Tuesday. "It was sent for a necropsy in Fredericton to confirm the type of snake and help understand what may have caused it to attack. It has been identified as an African Rock Python," Rogers-Marsh said, adding that autopsies on the boys were performed on Tuesday to determine their exact cause of death. Anne Bull, a spokeswoman for the Department of Natural Resources, said the African rock python is not an allowed species in New Brunswick province. The African rock python is non-venomous but is considered to be Africa's largest snake, growing up to 20 feet (6 meters) long and killing their prey by squeezing it. Steve Benteau, another department spokesperson, said he could not specifically comment on the snake involved in Monday's incident but made clear African rock pythons cannot be legally owned in New Brunswick. "The only exception would be an accredited zoo, which could apply to have exotic animals not found on the list (of the Exotic Wildlife Regulation)," he said. "Permits are never issued to keep an illegal exotic animal as a pet." Officials previously said the snake had escaped its enclosure at the Reptile Ocean store on the building's ground floor, but investigators indicated on Tuesday that the snake was actually held in a glass floor-to-ceiling enclosure on the second floor. It is believed the snake escaped through the top of its cage, slithering into a ventilation system above before dropping into the boys' room when a pipe broke. The store has not responded to the incident, but relatives and friends of the owner were hostile towards journalists who were outside the building on Tuesday. Messages were posted on the company's Facebook page on Monday after it received a flood of messages, many of them calling for criminal charges to be brought against the owner. "Deepest sympathies goes (sic) out to the family of the children. A terrible accident without a meaning. This page will be shut down temporarily to avoid any further demeaning comments," one post said before the page was taken down. "You should be ashamed of yourself. We all have a heavy heart today. As anyone would. And attacks on the animals (sic) owner are unnecessary." Rogers-Marsh said its Major Crime Unit is carrying out a criminal investigation into the incident, with the assistance of a reptile expert from the Magnetic Hill Zoo in Moncton.

Article online:

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