

Suspicious Python Release in Tampa; \$18K Reward Offered

WILMINGTON, N.C., Dec. 15 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- In Florida last week the AP reported a 12-foot long Burmese python was captured over the weekend of December 5th in Port Tampa by authorities. Vernon Yates of Wildlife Rescue and Rehabilitation in Seminole, says the snake's demeanor and condition indicate it is a pet that escaped or was released. The release occurred just days before a critical vote in the US Senate on whether to ban pythons in the United States. The bill being considered is S. 373 aka 'The Python Ban' Sponsored by Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL). If passed the bill would add many pythons and boas to the Injurious Wildlife list of the Lacey Act stopping the import, export and interstate transport of these animals. S. 373 is supported by the Humane Society of the United States, the largest animal rights group in the US that advocates for ending the trade in all captive bred reptiles.

Reptile industry professional Michael Cole of Tampa is concerned that the timing and circumstances of this python release are **"suspicious."** Cole commented that, **"over the years there have been many suspected manufactured releases of animals at crucial turning points in reptile related legislation."** A similar incident was perpetrated in North Carolina in 2008 when an ABC affiliate reported on a hoax involving two Monocled cobras released in Onslow County. WITN News reported that, **"[NC wildlife officials] believe the snakes were placed there by the group Animal Protection Institute (API) to raise awareness in making it illegal for people to own exotic animals."** In an e-mail to WITN News, API public relations director Zibby Wilder said her organization had nothing to do with the snake release. The API has since changed its name to Born Free USA and has cooperated with the Humane Society of the United States on anti-reptile legislation around the country.

Florida reptile professionals, the reptile industry and the United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK) have offered a reward of \$18,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone involved with the illegal release of this Burmese python.

Source: United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK)

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[USARK](http://www.usark.org)