



NEWS RELEASE

IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Python survives trip through sewers to metropolitan Denver's wastewater treatment plant

DENVER, Dec. 11—Most people think a sewer snake is something that's used to unstop a drain or a toilet.

But to several members of the Metro Wastewater Reclamation District plant operations staff, a sewer snake is something altogether different: It's a 4½-foot ball python named Duchess.

"(Plant Operator) Jim Gonzales was in the south bar screen building one day last April and saw the snake moving in the rag hopper there," said Plant Operator Rex Archer.

Gonzales called Archer, and together they got the snake out of the rag hopper and put it in a box in the Control Building for Plant Operator Stan Light, an amateur herpetologist who works nights.

"When I got in that day they asked me if I still kept snakes, and I said, 'Sure,'" said Light. And they told him about the ball python Gonzales had found.

"I got her out of the box and examined her and saw she had a small cut on her tail," Light said, so he washed her and put some hydrogen peroxide on the cut to disinfect it.

He said Duchess had become chilled on her watery journey to the Metro District plant north of Denver.

Then Light, who has had numerous snakes over the years, took her home to nurse her back to health.

Meanwhile, Plant Operator Chrissy Jackson, who also works nights, had heard about the snake and became interested.

"I was looking for a family pet," Jackson said, noting that different members of her family are allergic to cats and dogs.

"So I asked Stan if I could have the snake and he said, 'O.K.' And I took her home with me about two weeks later," Jackson said.

"I did some research and found out that they call this species of snake a 'royal python' in the U.K.," Jackson said.

"We decided we wanted a name that sounded like royalty, and Princess just didn't fit. Duchess seems to fit just fine, so that's what we named her."

Python survives... — page 2 of 2 — we named her.”

Jackson said Duchess has been a fine pet.

“My seven-year-old daughter, Cameron, gets her out and plays with her,” Jackson said. “She puts dresses on her, and even a sock.”

Light said Duchess probably escaped from someone’s home and either crawled down a toilet or went down a laundry room or other kind of drain. “They have an affinity for water,” said Light.

“Once in the sewer, she just swam with the flow,” he said. “When she got here she was very cold, and it took several weeks for her to warm up enough to eat again,” Light said.

Light said ball pythons mostly eat rats when they are in the savannahs of Africa where they are native. Jackson said the snake eats about every five to seven days.

Both he and Jackson emphasized that because snakes tend to live a long time—20 years or more—people need to be serious about adopting one as a pet.

The Metro Wastewater Reclamation District treats about 140 million gallons of wastewater a day for the 1.6 million residents of its service area, which encompasses most of metropolitan Denver. The Metro District’s system includes 232 miles of sewers.

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