

Aquarium's anaconda to mate or crush male

BY SAM COOPER, THE PROVINCE MARCH 29, 2011



A five-metre-long anaconda settles into her new home Monday at the Vancouver Aquarium. A mate will be introduced today.

Photograph by: Ian Smith -PNG, The Province

The five-metre-long green anaconda has already shown a flair for dramatic entrances at the Vancouver Aquarium, but this morning life and death will literally be in the balance when a male mate -or potential victim- is introduced to her.

Marine biologist Andrea Cotter watched a bit nervously Monday when four aquarium workers released the rescued anaconda into its new home in the Graham Amazon gallery.

The snake quickly scaled a tree, and soon after tore out a limb that was too much for her 45 kilograms, falling with a thud into a shallow basin of water about two metres below.

The anaconda, rescued from a warehouse in Milwaukee, seemed to take the fall well and was warming up to her cell, which gave Cotter some confidence.

A "successful male breeder," which normally lives in the enclosure and was taken out so as to not crowd the female on her first day, will join her today. The pair will eventually mate -or the much larger female could try to eat or crush the male to death.

"They could eat each other, but we won't let that happen," Dennis Thoney, Vancouver Aquarium's director of animal operations, said Monday. "We will make sure they're well fed before they get together. We're hoping they hit it off."

Cotter said "preparing for the worst" means about five employees will be at the ready to jump into the snake pit and try to disentangle them if they try to crush each other.

If the pair mate, they will roll up into a ball that will be more about fighting than loving, Cotter said.

"They don't mate for pleasure like dolphins or people do," Cotter said.

"He has to wrap her up to keep her there and it could take up to a week. They might roll around a bit, but they are basically fighting each other and using tremendous amounts of energy."

The green anaconda is "pound for pound" the largest snake in the world, and can grow up to nine metres, according to some reports, he said.

It lives in swamps, marshes and slow-moving streams, mainly in the tropical rainforests of the Amazon.

Male and female anacondas don't usually coexist, but when a female lays down a pheromone trail, multiple males will swarm toward her.

She can give birth to anywhere from 20 to 40 snakes, a typical litter, to as many as about 100.

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