

Snakes Alive.....A Nightmare, or what?

By Norbert Gleisner

Stepping from my shower and encountering five black snakes slithering on the bathroom floor wouldn't be the kind of ssssssurprise that would subsequently find me gently removing them to the outside with barbecue tongs.

Recently, our newspaper, however, reported the experience of a fourth-generation Florida woman who did exactly that. "After all," she said, "I shouldn't have been surprised because black racers go with the territory here in 'rural' Florida." "Could they have entered through an open sliding glass door or come up through the toilet?" she wondered.

That is a good question, especially whether they entered through the toilet. My experience, on three separate occasions, with finding snakes in my house on my living-room carpet and kitchen tile floor had me considering the very same question. When I told my neighbor about the incidents at the time, he suggested the toilet entry possibility as if it were a foregone conclusion. I laughed at the idea, but apparently other people, like that lady, for example, don't rule out the idea that it might be possible. I had simply assumed that they had made their entry while I opened the door to leave or enter, and I guess I still do - BUT!

The three snakes that were in my house were only about 6 inches long, just babies, and it was easy to chop them in two pieces with a big butcher knife as they innocently - and with pleading eyes - watched me sneak up on them with weapon raised for the kill.

A recent experience in my front yard with a 4 footer, however, was a bit more challenging and required a bolder approach. I had him cornered, spade at the ready, when he raised his head about a foot off the ground and headed at me with escape in mind, obviously not expecting a swinging spade to leave him with head dangling and attached by only a thin piece of his skin.

People say they are harmless black snakes - that they eat rats and mice, etc., but to me they are just snakes. All snakes, large or small, harmless or poisonous, give me the willies; if I were a religious person I would certainly consider them the devil personified. Water moccasins or cotton mouths, which are highly venomous, are also native here, and they look a lot like black racers, so I prefer not to spend a lot of time differentiating between harmless and possibly fatal. KILL 'EM ALL!

And now we have giant pythons - mostly exotic discarded ex-pets and their offspring that can grow to more than 20 feet long and weigh more than 200 pounds, moving into central Florida in the last 10-15 years. They have no natural predators and they love to bask in the warm Florida sunshine (sort of like snowbird retirees). Recently a 13 foot Everglades python made the news by being pictured trying to swallow a 6 foot alligator. The snake literally exploded from the effort. So much for the idea that gators would put a stop to python infestation.

Over 200 have been discovered living in the wild - mostly in the Everglades - but biologists say they are good swimmers and tree climbers who like elevated forest areas, which should make homeowners in places like the Leesburg area take note. "Experts" say that python attacks are not impossible, but their biggest threat to man will be on the highways and in urban areas. Can you imagine hitting a 15 foot, 150-pound python on the road - especially at night - with a Hyundai Accent or a Honda Civic? It's likely to be a serious problem, methinks.

Anyway - back to the possibility of a toilet entry into a house by a hungry snake. Not being versed in the intricacies of underground plumbing, I can only assume that it is not inconceivable even if it is somewhat improbable. Certainly a python with its mouth full of sharp teeth is ruled out because of its size, but a black racer that has been rounding the underground track could very well be heading for the finish line in a final dashing spurt for fresh air only to encounter something immense and seemingly threatening blocking its way. Obviously the snake has hit an impasse and would be desperate. What would it do and how would *you* react?

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