

# Don't look up! Bangkok's slitherers keep snake catchers busy

BANGKOK (AP) — Bangkok parkgoers looking for relief from renewed coronavirus restrictions got a slithering surprise in July when a python as long as two of the Thai capital's ubiquitous motorbikes was spotted in one of the city's most popular green spaces.

The reticulated python was only the latest big serpent to turn up in the dense center of Bangkok, where urban sprawl eating into natural habitats has been blamed for a rise in snake sightings in recent years.

This one was found in Benjasiri Park, which is flanked by towering hotels, apartment buildings, and several high-end shopping malls, that was largely off limits due to restrictions put in place to stem a surge in virus cases. The curbs shuttered non-essential businesses and limited restaurants to takeout only, leaving parks among the few public places still open.

As parents pushed strollers and joggers rounded a nearby running path, firefighters called in to corral the snake started by trying to capture it with a ladder from the ground up.



The python plotted its escape by heading out on a limb, bound for a building on the edge of the park that houses the World Fellowship of Buddhists.

Other firefighters were waiting for it on the roof of the building. While one used a stick to grab the python by the neck, another man tried to cut the branch it was

on. They soon coaxed it into a sack, tied up the bag, and carried it away.

Firefighter Somchai Yoosabai said the snake measured 11.5 feet long and weighed about 77 pounds.

Bangkok firefighters typically get thousands of snake-removal calls each year. Yoosabai said his department alone

**PERSISTENT PYTHON.** A firefighter tries to capture a python in Benjasiri Park in Bangkok, Thailand, on July 15, 2021. Bangkok parkgoers looking for relief from renewed coronavirus restrictions got a slithering surprise when a python as long as two of the Thai capital's ubiquitous motorbikes was spotted in the popular green space. Firefighter Somchai Yoosabai said the snake weighed about 77 pounds. (AP Photo/Adam Schreck)

has caught a snake or two a day during the current rainy season, mostly in neighborhoods or houses with pets.

As coronavirus cases rise, so do the risks.

"If any houses ... have COVID-19 cases, we have to go to catch the snakes anyway," he said. "Plus, wherever we go to catch a snake, the crowd is always there. We cannot avoid that."

Reticulated pythons are found throughout Southeast Asia, and are some of the largest snakes in the world. They hunt by coiling their body around their prey, typically small mammals and birds, though they have been known to occasionally attack humans.

Associated Press writer Chalida Ekvittayavechnukul contributed to this report.

## Images show Chinese ship waste endangering reefs

By Jim Gomez  
The Associated Press

**M**ANILA, The Philippines — Swarms of Chinese vessels have dumped human waste and wastewater for years in a disputed area of the South China Sea, causing algae blooms that have damaged coral reefs and threatened fish in an unfolding catastrophe, a U.S.-based expert said last month.

Satellite images over the last five years show how human waste, sewage, and wastewater have accumulated and caused algae in a cluster of reefs in the Spratlys region where hundreds of Chinese fishing ships have anchored in batches, said Liz Derr, who heads Similarity Inc., a software company creating artificial intelligence technologies for satellite imagery analysis.

At least 236 ships were spotted in the atoll, internationally known as Union Banks, on June 17 alone, she said at a Philippine online news forum on China's actions in the South China Sea, which Beijing has claimed virtually in its entirety.

"When the ships don't move, the poop piles up," Derr said. "The hundreds of ships that are anchored in the Spratlys are dumping raw sewage onto the reefs they are occupying."

Chinese officials did not immediately react to Derr's assessment of the environmental damage, but have said in the past that they have taken steps to protect the fisheries stock and the environment in the South China Sea. Aside from the Chinese, Vietnamese forces have also occupied some coral outcrops in Union Banks, which is also claimed by the Philippines, although it has no presence in the vast atoll.

Department of Foreign Affairs assistant secretary Eduardo Menez in Manila said the findings would have to be assessed and validated by Philippine authorities before a decision on whether to lodge a protest against China could be made.

"This is a catastrophe of epic proportions and we are close to the point of no return," Derr said.

She warned that schools of fish, including migratory tuna, breed in the reefs that are being damaged and could

cause fish stocks to considerably decline in an offshore area that is a key regional food source.

Separately, China's military said it chased a U.S. warship out of another disputed area of the South China Sea in mid-July after Washington warned an attack on the Philippines might activate a mutual defense treaty.

Beijing then affirmed its claims to portions of the sea that also are claimed by Southeast Asia governments. It rejected the Biden administration's declaration of support for a 2016 international tribunal ruling in favor of the Philippines that threw out most of them.

China is increasingly assertive about pressing its territorial claims, which are fuelling tension with neighbors including Japan, India, Vietnam, and the Philippines.

China's People's Liberation Army said it sent ships and planes after the U.S.S. *Benfold* entered waters claimed by Beijing around the Paracel Islands.

In March, Philippine authorities spotted more than 200 Chinese fishing vessels at Whitsun Reef, in the northeastern periphery of Union Banks, and demanded that China withdraw them from the area. China ignored the demand for weeks, while continuing to assert the reef is its own territory.

The Philippines argued that Whitsun Reef lies well within an internationally recognized stretch of waters where it has exclusive rights to exploit fisheries, oil, gas, and other sea resources. It cited the international tribunal's 2016 ruling that invalidated China's vast claims to the waterway on historical grounds and unanimously upheld the Philippines' sovereign rights to the so-called exclusive economic zone.

A few hundred protesters held a noisy rally last month in front of the Chinese Consulate in Manila to mark the fifth anniversary of the ruling, which China ignored and continues to defy. The protesters lashed out at Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, who has nurtured closer ties with Beijing, for refusing to aggressively demand that China comply with the landmark ruling.

Associated Press journalists Joael Calupitan and Aaron Favila contributed to this report.

**REEF REFUSE.** A fisherman throws his net beside the half-submerged M/V Palawan Pearl after it collided with a Cyprus-flagged BKM 104 dredger in Manila Bay, the Philippines, on July 8, 2021. The Philippine cargo vessel and the dredger collided in the bay anchorage area, resulting in no injuries but causing the cargo vessel to list and lie half-submerged in the busy waters. Satellite images over the last five years show how human waste, sewage, and wastewater have accumulated and caused algae in a cluster of reefs in the Spratlys region. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



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