

Police eyeing possible charges in cobra case

Neighbor: Python, other animals still in home after snake bites Eagle man

By **BRIAN HUBER**
Freeman Staff

EAGLE - When Pat Hawes watched the evening news Wednesday and saw a report that an area man had been bitten by a snake, she immediately thought about her neighbor.

"I heard the announcement a local person was bitten by a snake and I thought, 'I hope it wasn't Dave,'" Hawes said. "It turns out, it was."

David Schneider, 44, was bitten by a spitting cobra snake as he fed it about 2 a.m. Wednesday. Officials

learned of it later Wednesday and were able to procure an antivenom medicine from the Milwaukee County Zoo for him. He was listed in fair condition at Waukesha Memorial Hospital Thursday evening, said hospital spokeswoman Sandra Peterson.

Schneider owned "Critter Dave's Pets and Ponds" in Mukwonago before closing the store about a year ago. Hawes described her neighbor as a "reptile specialist," someone who was able to handle exotic rep-

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tiles and who also gave demonstrations on reptiles in the area.

Hawes said she and her husband were concerned about some of the animals the Schneiders kept at their home, but they get along great with Schneider and his wife.

"The people are so nice. I don't want to have anything bad happen to them," Hawes said. "We've known he has the animals there."

Hawes said the Schneiders also have alligators at their Sherman Street property, and may still have other snakes as well. She said Schneider told her he has a 16-foot python weighing more than 150 pounds. But Hawes said there has been no problem with animals in the past.

She recounted an incident in summer 2003 where her husband went out to their mailbox one day

to get a newspaper and saw an alligator staring at him from his front yard. Schneider came right over and took care of it, Hawes said. Apparently, Schneider took the alligator to a demonstration the previous night, left it in a sack overnight and it escaped.

"It's a little strange to find an alligator on your lawn, that's all," Hawes said.

Eagle police Chief Russell Ehlers said he was reviewing what charges, if any, might be filed in the case.

"There are very specific statutes, even in the absence of ordinances ... so that we can still take action on anything questionable we might find at the residence," Ehlers said. "It's a little premature to talk about charges, but in many cases, that's always a possibility."

Ehlers added that police are aware of an iguana, a Russian box turtle and two dogs still at Schneider's residence. Some of the animals might be left over from Schneider's store, Ehlers said.

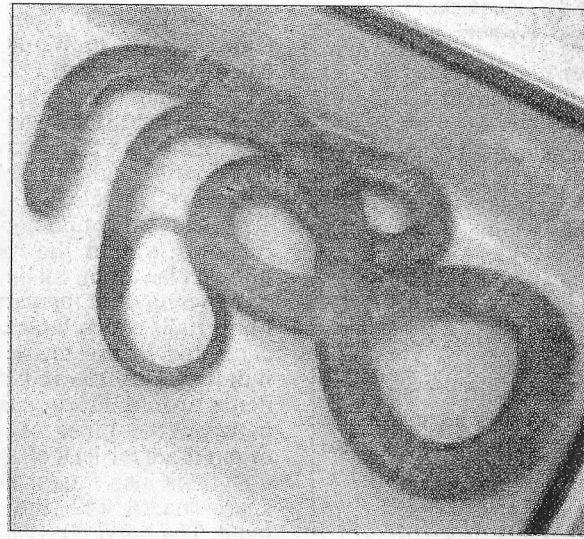


Photo courtesy James Stadler, county humane officer

This snake was euthanized at the Milwaukee County Zoo on Wednesday after biting its owner, a 44-year-old Eagle man, who was listed in fair condition Thursday at Waukesha Memorial Hospital. Officials are reviewing the case for possible charges.

Police have yet to interview Schneider.

"We anticipate that Dave and Debra (Schneider's wife) will be cooperative with us and our officer. We will hopefully be taking an inventory of the animals at the residence to see if there are any left that pose a threat," Ehlers said. "We are hoping that inventory is voluntary. If we meet with resistance, we will explore a search warrant."

A call placed at the Schneider residence Thursday afternoon was not returned.

Ehlers said he was never made aware that Schneider had a cobra in his possession.

"I can tell you that if this department knew someone in our village was housing a cobra, we certainly would have looked into it long before this kind of incident would have happened," Ehlers said.

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Hawes, Pat

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