

**DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
DEPARTMENT OF LAND & NATURAL RESOURCES**

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 **HAWAII BOARD OF AGRICULTURE BOARD OF LAND & NATURAL RESOURCES**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**NR19-14**

**June 12, 2019**

**SNAKE HITCHHIKES TO MAUI IN BACKPACK**

HONOLULU – A small juvenile snake was captured after it was seen slithering out of a newly arrived visitor’s backpack Monday night at a Maui vacation rental in Pukalani. The owner of the rental informed the visitor and others staying in the rental that snakes are illegal in Hawaii and they reported it to Maui police. Police contacted Dr. Fern Duvall, program manager of the Native Ecosystem Protection Management - Maui Nui program of the Department of Land and Natural Resources (DLNR) who responded with police and helped to detain the snake overnight. The snake was turned over to the Hawaii Department of Agriculture (HDOA) early Tuesday morning and is being safeguarded on Maui and will be transported to Honolulu.

Dr. Duvall, in consultation with an expert on the Mainland, has determined that the snake is a non-venomous southern black racer (*Coluber constrictor priapus*). The brown-colored snake appears to be a newborn measuring about a foot long and 1/4 inch in diameter. They are mainly found in Florida and the eastern half of the U.S. and may grow up to six feet in length. Their diet consists of mainly frogs, lizards, snakes, rodents, birds and their eggs.

HDOA Plant Quarantine inspectors interviewed the visitor and the property owner Tuesday morning and it appears the snake was a stowaway and not purposely transported to Hawaii. The visitor, a 20-year-old male from Virginia, had just arrived Monday night from Florida and had put down his backpack on the floor in the rental when the snake slithered out.

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**Snake Hitchhikes to Maui in Backpack
June 12, 2019
Page 2**

“It is fortunate that the owner of the rental was aware of the seriousness of the snake being transported to Hawaii and took appropriate action and reported it,” said Phyllis Shimabukuro-Geiser, chairperson of the Hawaii Board of Agriculture. “Visitors to our islands may not fully understand the threat that snakes pose to our community and our unique environment. It takes all of us to protect Hawaii.”

“Be informed about the very special place you live that is Hawaii, said Dr. Duvall. “We should pay attention to what plants and animals we see - report things you feel are new to you as prevention is so much more important than having to react to established foreign pests out of control.”

Snakes have no natural predators in Hawaii and pose a serious threat to Hawaii's environment. Many species also prey on birds and their eggs, increasing the threat to endangered native birds. Venomous and large snakes are also a danger to humans, pets and other animals.

Individuals who see or know of illegal animals in Hawaii are encouraged to contact the State’s toll-free **PEST HOTLINE at 643-PEST (7378)** or turn them in under the State’s Amnesty Program. The maximum penalty under State law for possession and/or knowingly transporting illegal animals is a class C felony, $200,000 fine and up to three years in prison.

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**Attachment: Photo with size reference, courtesy HDOA**

**Photo and videos via Dropbox, courtesy DLNR:** <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7w5eawszdw5t5v2/AAC0v_AagQq_NRCKWgxsNVQNa?dl=0>

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