

Thieves steal exotic reptiles from Australian ZOO

July 15 2013



Juvenile American alligators (*Alligator mississippiensis*) are seen at the Australian Reptile Park at Gosford, near Sydney, on October 8, 2004. Thieves stole a horde of exotic reptiles from the park, including a baby alligator, leaving their keepers fearing they could be destined for the black market.

Thieves stole a horde of exotic reptiles from an Australian zoo, including a baby alligator, leaving their keepers fearing they could be destined for the black market.

Twenty-three creatures, mostly snakes, lizards and geckos, were taken from their enclosures at the Australian Reptile Park north of Sydney during a night-time raid on Sunday, senior curator Liz Vella said.

"They had smashed through the enclosures and broken doors," she told AFP, in a [robbery](#) which lasted about seven minutes.

"These guys obviously came in with the purpose of taking the [animals](#). They definitely knew what they wanted."

Vella said officials were still speculating on the motive behind the robbery, but usually such thefts were by young people who "wanted a bunch of [reptiles](#) for their home and to show off to their friends".

"(But) it's definitely a concern that they will try to sell them on the [black market](#)," she said.

She said the black market value of the animals sold together was only about Aus\$10,000 (US\$9,000) but their value to the keepers who had cared for them, often for years, was "a lot more".

Reptile park staff said none of the animals stolen was dangerous but they feared they may not survive being pulled from their specially-controlled environments, particularly during the cool of the southern hemisphere winter.

They might also present a danger to each other if kept in close proximity.

Vella said staff were devastated that the animals, which included an alligator hatchling, had been taken.

Police are investigating the robbery.

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