

US naturalist battles with snake for TV, but not eaten alive (Update)

December 8 2014, by Brigitte Dusseau



Paul Rosolie discusses his experience being eaten alive by a snake at the Discovery Channel offices in New York on December 3, 2014

When naturalist Paul Rosolie wanted to focus attention on the destruction of the Amazon rainforest, he decided he needed a stunt guaranteed to get people looking.

So the staunch environmentalist offered himself as dinner to an anaconda—and was prepared to be swallowed alive, filming every moment.

But in the end, Rosolie wasn't exactly ingested by the snake, disappointing viewers who expected a journey into the belly of the deadly beast.

Instead he let the anaconda coil around him before calling the mission off, fearing he might get seriously injured.

Anacondas, the largest snakes in the world, typically suffocate their prey before ingesting it, making Rosolie's attempt all the more dangerous.

Rosolie survived, and now people all around the world have a chance to watch his harrowing struggle with the beast, after its debut broadcast Sunday night in the United States on the Discovery Channel.

The idea came to him after a decade spent working in, and working to save, the rainforest habitat, Rosolie told AFP.

"Everybody on Earth knows that the rainforests are disappearing and most people can tell you how important they are, but still, not enough people are paying attention, not enough people realize this is such a problem."

The American activist said he was proud to take on the adventure, even though the prospect of dying was hard to swallow.

'I need help'

To avoid suffocating, experts crafted Rosolie a specially designed carbon fiber suit, equipped with a breathing system—as well as with cameras

and a system to communicate.

"We didn't know if this was going to work, if I was going to be eaten, but we made sure that if I did make it inside the snake, I wouldn't suffocate," Rosolie explained after the ordeal.

The next challenge was trying to find a snake in the Peruvian Amazon jungle.

"We spent 60 days out in the jungle, camping, hiking, looking through swamps every night," Rosolie said.



Paul Rosolie said he wanted to do the stunt to attract attention to the destruction of the Amazon rainforest

Eventually, they found a female snake, which at, six meters (20 feet)

long, fit the bill.

"When I went up to the snake, it didn't try to eat me right away," Rosolie recounted.

"It tried to escape. And when I provoked it a little bit, and acted a little more like a predator, that's when it turned around and defended itself."

In the end, Rosolie wasn't swallowed whole by the giant serpent, but instead wrestled with the beast as she coiled around him before he aborted the mission.

As the snake wrapped around a suited-up Rosolie—at one point opening its wide jaws on his helmet—the daredevil said she was squeezing his arm tight, which he feared might break.

"I felt her jaw on my helmet and I could hear a gurgling and wheezing," he said, after surviving the standoff with the snake.

His team looked on worried as his breathing strained and his heart rate slowed.

He told them he was feeling light-headed and as the anaconda squeezed tight around him, he called for help.

"Guys you need to get in here... I'm calling it I need help!" he said from inside the suit, prompting the support crew to rescue an exhausted Rosolie from the anaconda's powerful grip.

"Her crush force was fully on my exposed arm so I just started to feel the blood drain out of my hand and I felt the bone start to flex and when that got to a point when I felt like it was about to snap, I had to tap out," he said.

Viewers on social media were swift in criticizing the show's misleading title after it aired Sunday.



Members of the Chico Mendes Environmental Institute remove trees cut down by illegal wood cutters across the trails of the Trairao Amazonic forest reserve, west of the Para state, northern Brazil on December 4, 2011

"'Eaten Alive' to be retitled 'Eaten Alive: Just Kidding,'" said one user.

Another tweeted: "Eaten Alive? More like Briefly Drooled On By A Snake While Alive."

Anaconda doing well

He insisted his team was careful not to harm the snake and that he was

the only one in danger.

"We didn't force the snake to do anything, we didn't ask from the snake anything out of the ordinary," Rosolie said, explaining that "snakes very often regurgitate if they're eating something and a predator comes by, they have to give up their meal so they can escape," he said before the program was aired.

The anaconda is now doing well, he said.

But Rosolie has faced fierce criticism from animal rights groups, including from PETA, who said "the snake was tormented and suffered for the sake of ratings."



Staunch environmentalist Paul Rosolie offered to do the dangerous stunt in order to focus attention on the destruction of the Amazon rainforest

Rosolie said he even received death threats.

But he wasn't fazed, saying the shock value is important to increase attention to his cause—even if he was not exactly eaten alive.

A fund linked to the show was set up to raise awareness and money to protect the Amazon and could also allow for more research of anacondas in their habitat.

After the US showing, the inaccurately named "Eaten Alive" will air on December 10 in Finland, Denmark, Hungary, Poland and Sweden, and two days later in Australia, before being broadcast in other countries, including China and India.

Discovery said it expect at least three million viewers in the United States and a million others around the world.

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