

Lizards Being Trained for Space Mission

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Russian scientists are training geckos to go into space in a research satellite, Interfax reported Wednesday.

The reptiles will undergo a tough selection process before departing with the Bion-M satellite, which is set to be launched toward the end of 2012, said a spokesman for the Institute of Biomedical Problems.

"The basic principles for selection and preparation are the same as those for human cosmonauts. We will leave out weak and ill ones, and there will also be no place for those which are easily excited or aggressive," the spokesman stated.

One advantage of lizards is that they need very little training because they are already adapted to similar conditions as those experienced in space, the spokesman noted.

"Geckos don't need much special training because of their particular way of life — they are not badly fitted to extreme conditions," he said. "Even under effects of unusual gravity changes, you see that they don't care where they run, on the floor, wall or ceiling."

Scientists are also preparing "doubles" for the lizards so that they can replace individual or whole groups of reptiles if anything goes wrong, the spokesman said.

Fifteen lizards will be placed on the satellite in three containers, five per container, while on earth a control group will live in the same conditions.

"They will experience identical conditions, apart from weightlessness and other gravitational movements that are only possible in space. That way we will be able to know which changes happened by coincidence and which were linked with sending them into orbit," the spokesman said.

One of Russia's most famous cosmonauts was an animal: In 1957, the Soviet Union launched Laika, the first dog to orbit the Earth, in the Sputnik-2 spacecraft.

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