

Russian Sex Geckos 'Died Together in Space but Weren't Mummified'

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The geckos had been on a two-month mission launched to facilitate research on the effects of zero-gravity on reproductive systems.

Autopsies performed on Russia's infamous sex geckos indicate that they died en masse about two days prior to their return to earth, leading scientist Sergei Savelyev said Tuesday.

Russian news reports had claimed earlier that the geckos were found frozen and "mummified," a claim resolutely denied by Savelyev, the man in charge of the experiment.

Their mission was simple: have sex in order to facilitate research on the effects of microgravity on reproduction.

They were launched into space from the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan nearly two months ago to carry out a 60-day mission. But citing the mission's apparent success, Russia's

space agency Roscosmos announced last week that the crew would return home after only 44 days in orbit.

Sadly, the entire crew of sex geckos was found dead on arrival in Orenburg on Monday.

Savelyev told reporters that autopsies were expected to be conducted on the entire five-gecko crew by the end of Tuesday.

He added that the geckos died practically simultaneously, lamenting: "The poor things died within a few hours of each other," state news agency RIA Novosti reported.

The geckos likely died within the past two or three days, Savelyev said. Denying earlier reports of frozen gecko mummies, he noted that the mummification process would have required at least a month to take place.

In comments to Interfax, Savelyev said that a failure of the life-support system was likely to blame for the deaths. He then launched into a tirade about the state of the space program's management and its shoe-string budget.

Savelyev, told Interfax that biologists would refuse to send any future geckos into space until engineers could devise a reliable method to keep them alive. "This is a mockery of science," he exclaimed.

Roscosmos and the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medical and Biological Programs — the agencies that jointly conducted the experiment — have opened a special investigation to study data from the satellite and produce a more conclusive report.

Moreover, the space agency will phase out the use of the Foton-series spacecraft for future biological satellite missions, moving instead to the newer Bion-M vehicles.

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