

Police: Intruder who fondled kids jailed

DNA linked suspect to 'Creeper' series in Escondido, San Marcos, authorities said

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ESCONDIDO — An intruder suspected of climbing into the bedrooms of North County children and touching them while they slept has been arrested, authorities said Wednesday.

The suspect, Gilbert Andrew Chavarria, 27, was linked to the string of crimes by DNA, Escondido police and the San Diego Sheriff's Department officials said in a joint news conference. Though his DNA was not in the state's database, authorities found a familial match that eventually led them to Chavarria. It's the first time in San Diego County that a familiar match resulted in such an arrest, police said.

Chavarria was jailed Monday on \$4.5 million bail, on suspicion of a number of crimes, including lewd and lascivious acts with a child, according to jail records.

The terrifying incidents date back to the summer of 2013 when a series of attacks took place in Escondido and San Marcos in which an intruder crawled through or reached into the open bedroom windows of girls and fondled them while they slept. There were six victims that ranged in age from 5 to 15.

Three of the attacks took place in Escondido in the vicinity of Oak Hill and Bear Valley roads, the fourth happened near Nordahl Road in neighboring San Marcos, roughly six miles to the west of the initial incidents.

In August 2013, two sheriff's deputies in Escondido attempted to contact a suspect who they now believe was Chavarria. He fled and the attacks stopped.

DNA was collected from two of the crime scenes, but didn't match any samples already in the system, authorities said. In September 2013, the sheriff's department sent the samples to the California Department of Justice to see if there was a familial match to any other person in the state's database.

Last week, the state notified the sheriff's lab that a match had been found and the name of a potential suspect was provided. Investigators began following Chavarria, who lived in Escondido and sometimes Fallbrook, and worked at an Escondido auto repair shop. Authorities said that on Saturday he discarded an item that contained his own DNA, which then proved to be a match to the crime scenes.

Chavarria was arrested Monday and is scheduled to be arraigned Thursday at the Vista courthouse.

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