

Beat: Miscellaneous

Madeleine McCann case: UK police hunt intruder who assaulted girls

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USPA News - British police investigating the disappearance of Madeleine McCann issued a further appeal for information on Wednesday after identifying a potential link between the girl's disappearance in Portugal in 2007 and a series of assaults in the region. The twelve reported crimes involved a male intruder gaining access to villas occupied by British families on holiday in western Algarve, the Portuguese region where Madeleine disappeared in May 2007. The series of crimes took place between 2004 and 2010.

Of the twelve offenses, four occurred in the civil parish of Praia de Carvoeiro, six in Vale da Parra of Praia da Gale district, and two in the parish where Madeleine disappeared, Praia da Luz. In four of the twelve cases, the intruder sexually assaulted five white girls between the ages of 7 and 10 as they slept in their beds. On one of these occasions, the intruder assaulted two girls in one villa. "These matters are very serious and it's very important, primarily for us, to understand and identify who this offender is," said Detective Chief Inspector Andy Rosewood of Scotland Yard. "Firstly, because clearly no one has been prosecuted for these horrible crimes against these young people and secondly because once we have identified this offender we need to be able to prove or disprove whether these offenses and that offender are connected to the disappearance of Madeleine McCann." While the series of crimes are not identical to Madeleine's disappearance, British police feel there are enough similarities to warrant an intense search for the intruder. In most of the cases there were no signs of forced entry into the homes and no stolen items, which is similar to Madeleine's case. Witnesses described the intruder as "having dark (as in tanned) skin with short dark unkempt hair," Scotland Yard said. The intruder is reported to have spoken in English with a strong foreign accent and with slurred, slow speech. In some cases, the intruder - said to have a "potbelly" and a "noticeable odor" - was seen bare-chested. On two occasions in Vale de Parra and Praia da Gale, however, he was seen wearing a long sleeve, burgundy top. One witness described the top as having a white circle on its back. Redwood encouraged any victims of similar crimes and all those who may have seen a man fitting the witnesses' descriptions to contact Scotland Yard as soon as possible. "If you have been a victim of a similar crime please come forward even if you reported the incident to police in Portugal, or anywhere else," he said. "Please do not assume we have been made aware of it." Redwood reminded the public that Scotland Yard continues to offer a reward of up to £20,000 (\$33,250) for information leading to the identification, arrest and prosecution of the person or persons responsible for Madeleine's disappearance. "Please call us on 0800 0961011 if you are within the UK. The number for non-UK residents is +44 207 1580 126," Redwood said. "Alternatively if you do not want to speak to us directly you can contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111." Scotland Yard said it received more than 5,000 calls after last year's appeal and said it generated "new information," though no suspects have been identified and Madeleine's whereabouts remain unknown. "While some of these offenses have been in the public domain before, following our appeal in October three more were reported to us as a direct result of that appeal," Redwood said on Wednesday. "One of those reports we believe is the first in the potential series." Madeleine McCann was abducted from her family's holiday home in Praia da Luz, the location of two of the twelve crimes police are now investigating, on May 3, 2007. It happened as the girl's parents, Kate and Gerry McCann, were dining with their travel companions in a restaurant 50 meters (160 feet) away. The McCanns and their travel companions claimed to have taken turns checking on the children throughout the evening until Madeleine's mother discovered that she was missing at 10 p.m. local time. There were no signs of forced entry but the bedroom window was found to be open. Portugal's attorney general closed the case in July 2008, but the McCanns continued to investigate Madeleine's abduction. In May 2011, Scotland Yard decided to re-investigate the case and set up a new inquiry known as Operation Grange, which continues to search for information regarding Madeleine's disappearance.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

UPA United Press Agency LTD

483 Green Lanes

UK, London N13NV 4BS

contact (at) unitedpressagency.com

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