

Highlights:

- Watch for Iguanas falling from trees!
- Snake ban slipping
- Are you up for the Python Challenge™?
- REDDy goes LIVE!
- Join your CISMA!
- How much do cats actually kill? (Get the Infographic!)

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Focal Species: Introduced Iguanas

Scientific name:

Iguana iguana (Green)
Ctenosaura similis (Spiny)

Size:

3–4 feet long

Native range:

South America (Green)
Central America (Spiny)

Notes:

Coloration can vary – look at the tails to help identify the species!



UPPER: Green Iguana LOWER: Black Spiny-tailed Iguana
(Photos by Dr. Steve A. Johnson)

Several species of iguanas have been introduced in Florida and a few have established breeding populations. The most widely-distributed of these species are the Green Iguana and the Black Spiny-tailed Iguana. Both are found near water in coastal areas and along canals in central and southern Florida. Distribution maps for these iguanas and many other introduced species can be viewed online on the [Early Detection & Distribution Mapping System \(EDDMapS\)](#). The two species are similar in appearance but the Black Spiny-tailed Iguanas are typically grayish-brown and have rings of spikes on the tail, whereas Green Iguanas are usually more greenish and have dark banded tails.

Both species are omnivores that likely have little effect on native species, although they could help to spread invasive plants. However, they are considered invasive because they are a huge nuisance to humans – they eat ornamental landscape and garden plants, dig burrows that could weaken seawalls, and defecate copiously on seawalls and patios. They also pose a potential health risk because their feces can carry *Salmonella* bacteria that are a potential pathogen for humans and our pets. Iguanas are also causing economic damage. The Boca Grande community on Gasparilla Island pays thousands each year to control Black Spiny-tailed Iguanas and even levied a tax to help pay for iguana control. Their iguana problem was so serious that at one time there were ten iguanas for every human on the island!

Every winter, we hear stories of cold-stunned Green Iguanas falling from trees and being nursed back to health. However, these are invasive species and it is illegal to release them after they have been rescued. These cold snaps help to control this species! This winter when you hear similar stories, be sure to educate others about this invasive species. [Learn More...](#)



Burmese Python – one of many introduced reptiles that have established breeding populations in Florida. (Photo by Pat Lynch, SFWMD)

Science: No Tens Rule for Herps?

The "tens rule" predicts that 10% of introduced species establish breeding populations and 10% of those established species spread. Although this rule is often cited as a general principle, numerous studies have shown that various birds, fishes, and mammals establish and spread at rates that are significantly higher than 10%. Studies have calculated astonishingly high establishment rates as high as 85% for some species. However, establishment rates have been found to vary greatly among different groups of animals.

Some studies that tested the tens rule considered "herps"--the artificial group that includes amphibians and reptiles--but did not study these vastly different taxonomic Classes separately. In response to this knowledge gap, Ferreira et al. (2012) recently examined global records of amphibian and reptile introduction and establishment to determine the rate of establishment and compare establishment rates between islands and continents. They found that the establishment rates for both amphibians (67%) and reptiles (62%) were significantly higher than the 10% predicted by the tens rule, and establishment rates did not differ between "herp" groups. These global findings are similar to findings in Florida – Krysko et al (2011) found that 41% of "herp" species introduced in the state became established.

These researchers also found that reptiles--but not amphibians--were much more likely to become established when introduced on islands as compared to continental areas. This suggests that sensitive island habitats are extremely susceptible to reptile invasions.

[Learn More...](#)

Legislation: Snake Importation Ban

On January 26, 2011, Rep. Thomas Rooney [R-FL] introduced [H.R. 511](#)--a proposed ban on importation of Indian pythons (including Burmese), northern and southern African pythons, reticulated pythons, boa constrictors, and green, yellow, DeSchaunsee's, and Beni anacondas. The bill passed committee hearings and on February 28, 2012 was sent to the House of Representatives as a whole for consideration. More than nine months later, [news reports suggest that this bill is "slipping out of the hands of lawmakers"](#) as Congressmen fail to pass this bill. Opponents of the bill scoff at reports that pythons have rebounded from cold snaps and could increase their range in the southern U.S. and refuse to support a Federal bill to address what they consider a Florida problem. However, H.R. 511 is merely an importation ban designed to reduce introductions and does nothing to deal with Florida's problem – the thousands of snakes living in the Everglades.

2013 Python Challenge™

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) recently announced the 2013 Python Challenge™ to increase public awareness about Burmese pythons. On January 12th, the FWC will begin a month-long program of harvesting pythons from public lands. People can sign up to compete to see who can catch the longest or most pythons. There will be a 'General Competition' and a 'Python Permit Holders Competition'--participants in each category can win a grand prize of \$1,500 for harvesting the most Burmese pythons and an additional \$1,000 prize for the longest Burmese python. For more information about how to train and register for the competitions visit PythonChallenge.org. On Feb 16th, the challenge will conclude with an awareness and awards event at Zoo Miami..



REDDy Goes LIVE!

The Introduced Reptile Early Detection and Documentation training – also known as REDDy training – has been available as an online training course since 2010. Trainees learn how to look for and recognize large reptile invaders in Florida, collect accurate data when they spot a large reptile, and submit reports to the proper authorities. Anyone who is interested can [visit Dr. Johnson’s REDDy webpage](#) for more information and a link to the online version of the course.

Now, you also have the option to complete the REDDy LIVE version of the training at a classroom training hosted by your local Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA; see story below) and The Nature Conservancy. The REDDy training is an important part of the Python Patrol training and is required for participation in the 2013 Python Challenge™. Check [your local CISMA](#) for upcoming training dates near you!



Invasive Species Know No Boundaries

The [Florida Invasive Species Partnership \(FISP\)](#) is a collaboration of federal, state and local agencies along with non-government organizations, all with a stake in managing invasive non-native species in Florida. The FISP has been central to establishing voluntary regional partnerships to address invasive species issues, such as the [Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas](#) (CISMAs; see map). These CISMAs are working to educate partners about invasive species detection, prevention, and management and are have expanded coverage in Florida to include nearly the entire state. The CISMAs are training a network of rapid responders – such as the Python Patrol – to deal with new invasions. [Join your local CISMA](#) if you haven’t already and check the FISP calendar for upcoming training events.



“How much do cats actually kill?”

Recent research conducted by the University of Georgia attached cameras to house cats and monitored their activities. When this study was featured by National Geographic, it inspired a fantastic infographic cartoon for adults by The Oatmeal – these two images are just a sneak preview. Check it out! http://theoatmeal.com/comics/cats_actually_kill

What your cat shows you



What your cat DOES NOT show you





This newsletter is produced by:

Dept. of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation

Dr. Steve A. Johnson,
Associate Professor & Extension Specialist

and

Monica E. McGarrity,
Johnson Lab Outreach Coordinator

Do you have questions, comments,
suggestions, or an In Focus photo?
Want to be added to the mailing list?

Email monicaem@ufl.edu



In Focus...

Thanks to one well-informed Floridian, the holidays will be much happier for one native Green Treefrog. The invasive Cuban Treefrog (shown here attempting to swallow the smaller native Green Treefrog) was captured and euthanized humanely and the native Green Treefrog was released.



(Photo © Curt Wilkinson 2012)

The Invader Updater is a quarterly newsletter focused primarily on providing information on invasive vertebrate animals in Florida and the southeastern U.S. and was first published in Fall 2009.

Related Resources

- ◆ Global Invasive Species Database species profiles: [Iguana iguana](#) & [Ctenosaura similis](#)
- ◆ EDDMapS Distribution maps: [Iguana iguana](#) & [Ctenosaura similis](#)
- ◆ Ferreira et al. (2012) [Global assessment of establishment success for amphibian and reptile invaders](#). Wildlife Research 39(7) 637-640
- ◆ [Congressmen Fail To Get A Tight Grasp On Python Bill](#) - WLRN, 5 Dec 2012
- ◆ [H.R. 511 Python Import Ban](#) – GovTrack.us
- ◆ [FWC: 2013 Python Challenge™](#)
- ◆ [Florida Invasive Species Partnership](#) & [Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas of Florida](#)
- ◆ [The Cuban Treefrog in Florida](#) – UF/IFAS EDIS Fact Sheet
- ◆ [FWC Non-native Amnesty Day Events](#)
- ◆ Know of an important resource? Let us know – email a description and URL to monicaem@ufl.edu.