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Everglades National Park News Release

EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA

The National Park Service cares for special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS - PYTHONS

How were Burmese pythons introduced into the Everglades?

The introduction of the Burmese python to natural areas in the Everglades is a direct result of their presence and abundance in the pet trade in the urban and suburban areas of Miami-Dade and adjacent counties. If significant numbers of animals are present in the pet trade, accidental or intentional release is likely. Despite state laws that make it illegal to release any non-indigenous animal in Florida without first obtaining a permit from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, enforcement is difficult.

Invasive animal species are a rapidly increasing environmental and economic problem in the United States. Florida now ranks as having the largest number of established non-indigenous reptile species in the entire world (56). For further information, see this web link: <http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/burmesepythonsintro.htm>

When was the first python discovered in the Everglades National Park?

Confirmed sightings of pythons in the park have been made since the mid-1990s. Unconfirmed sightings, in and around the park, date back to the 1970s and 1980s. Over time, park biologists began to suspect that Burmese pythons had become a reproducing population and were no longer just a set of unrelated individuals. Small hatchlings and females carrying fertile eggs were observed starting in the late 1990s. In 2006, scientists found the first python nests.

What is the scientific name of the Burmese python?

The scientific name of the Burmese python is *Python molurus bivittatus*.

What is the native home of the Burmese python?

The Burmese python, as its name suggests, is native to Southeast Asia, as well as lowland eastern India and parts of southern China.

To what size can Burmese pythons grow?

Considered one of the world's largest constrictor snakes, exceptional Burmese python individuals can exceed 20 feet in length and 400 pounds in weight and in captivity can grow 200 mm (nearly 8 inches) per month. Their growth is among the fastest recorded for snakes. The largest snakes found so far in south Florida have measured over 17 feet long.

How many Burmese pythons live in south Florida?

It is not possible to give a precise estimate of how many Burmese pythons now live in south Florida. From 2000 through November 2012, more than 1,950 pythons have been removed from Everglades National Park and adjacent lands. Due the cryptic coloration of this snake, its behavior, and the nature of the Everglades landscape, only a very small percentage of the pythons present are ever detected. For additional information, see these web links:

<http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/burmesepythonremoval.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/burmesepythonresearch.htm>

Are people at risk from wild Burmese pythons?

The Burmese python is a non-venomous snake that obtains its prey by biting and then constricting the prey animal. There are no reports of wild pythons attacking park visitors in Everglades National Park, however, because the python can reach large sizes, they can pose a threat to human safety and, as with our large native reptiles (American alligator and American crocodile), should be avoided.

Will I see a Burmese python during my visit to Everglades National Park?

It is very unlikely that you will see a Burmese python during your visit. If you do see a large snake that you think may be a python, do not approach or touch the animal. Instead, take a photo from a safe distance if possible and report the time and place of the sighting to park personnel. If you have cell phone reception at the location, you may dial #NPS to leave your message. If you do not have cell phone reception, please provide the information at the visitor center when you leave the park. You may also report sightings of Burmese pythons and other invasive species through the 1-888-Ive-Got1 phone number or at the www.IveGot1.org website. For more on how to report sightings of invasive species, see this web link:

<http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/reportinvaders.htm>

What impact do Burmese pythons have on the Everglades?

Pythons consume a wide variety of native prey species, including mammals, birds and alligators, and therefore pose a risk to the native resources of the Everglades, including already threatened and endangered species. One study has implicated the Burmese python in the decline of native mammal species in Everglades National Park (available here: <http://www.pnas.org/content/109/7/2418.full>). Additional studies are being conducted to determine the level of impact the Burmese pythons are having on native species.

What is being done to manage the Burmese python?

Over the last decade, the National Park Service has invested significant time and resources (over \$1.5 million) in cooperative efforts with our south Florida land management partners that have increased our understanding of the ecology and population biology of established invasive constrictors in the Everglades. These partnerships have helped evaluate potential control strategies to address present populations and better educate the public in how to help prevent the release of additional invasive exotic species. The National Park Service is an active participant in the Everglades Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (ECISMA) – an interagency body to coordinate invasive species management in the Everglades. In addition, Everglades National Park has developed a program making use of about 30 volunteers as Authorized Agents to search for and remove pythons from the park. Pythons captured are turned over to park biologists and provide valuable natural history information. The captured pythons have been used in radio telemetry studies, trap design trials, and testing of tissue for mercury and genetic analysis. This limited program is not specifically designed to suppress the python population. For more on the strategies employed, see these web links:

<http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/npspythonmanagement.htm>

<http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/floridainvaders.htm>

Can the Burmese python be eradicated from the Everglades?

Current management options for Burmese pythons are few. Trapping methods have proven to be of limited success, but need more testing and field trials. Detection and removal of individuals by hand, through walking and scanning of natural areas with or without the assistance of detector dogs, is the primary removal method; however, no evidence currently indicates that this method is affecting the Burmese python population expansion. Additional research on control is needed. The odds of eradicating an introduced population of reptiles once it has spread across a large area are very low, pointing to the importance of prevention, early detection, and rapid response to new invasions.

What is done with the pythons you capture?

Pythons captured in the park are humanely euthanized and then studied to learn more about what they consume, their growth rates, and reproductive capacity. This information is important to understanding the species and its potential impact on the Everglades ecosystem.

Are there other large, exotic snakes in south Florida?

Evidence suggests that other large, nonnative constrictors, such as the Northern African python and the boa constrictor are established in south Florida. Isolated individuals of other constrictor species have been encountered, including yellow anacondas, green anacondas, and reticulated pythons. The National Park Service and our partners are taking actions to detect, assess, and respond to new invasive species in order to best manage and control these threats to the ecosystem. For more information on a range of invasive species threats to south Florida, see this web link:

<http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/floridainvaders.htm>

Do you have photos of Burmese pythons for media use?

Yes, you can find a selection of photos available for public use at this web link:

<http://www.nps.gov/ever/naturescience/Burmese-Pythons-in-the-Everglades.htm>