

Sarasota County Government



Exotic Reptile Management Plan



**SARASOTA COUNTY
EXOTIC REPTILE MANAGEMENT PLAN**

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Executive Summary

Sarasota County has developed an Exotic Reptile Management Plan (ERMP) in response to the emerging threat of expanding populations of non-native reptiles. This plan proactively addresses the issue and identifies opportunities to manage for non-native reptile species.

Species that pose the greatest risk to Sarasota County include: Nile monitor, black spiny tail iguana, green iguana, and Burmese python. These species adversely impact natural systems and pose a threat to protected wildlife species. Moreover, they may damage private property, degrade opportunities for tourism, and can pose a threat to the public's health, safety and welfare.

The goal of the ERMP is to reduce the overall population of non-native reptiles in Sarasota County and their associated threats. The ERMP establishes a strategic plan to monitor populations, provide for public outreach and education, conduct focused removal activities, and explore research opportunities.

For the purposes of this report, the use of the term "exotic" means species that are non-native and invasive.

Background

Sarasota County is located on the southwest coast of Florida and has a subtropical climate. The warm and humid climate predisposes the County and other parts of Florida to invasion by plants and animals from other areas of the world with similar climates. As a result, exotic reptile populations have been on the rise in Florida. In addition, many of these reptiles are likely former pets illegally released or escapees from captivity. Once free, these invasive species thrive and out-compete native animal species for food and habitat resources. It is not clear at this time if the reptiles observed in Sarasota County are entirely the result of a northward expansion of south Florida populations, or if they are isolated inappropriate releases of captive animals from the pet trade.

Exotic reptile breeding populations have already become established in areas of south and southwest Florida such as the Everglades, Lee County, Boca Grande, and Marco Island. These and other communities have experienced the negative effects of these reptiles and the high costs associated with management and removal activities. By 2006, observations of exotic reptiles were becoming more frequent in Sarasota County. Reptiles documented in the County have the ability to establish breeding populations.

Threats

Given their nature, exotic reptiles do not belong in the Florida landscape. These and other invasive species disrupt Florida's natural systems and can adversely affect the human environment.

Natural Systems

Exotic reptiles pose a serious threat to natural systems, specifically protected wildlife species. These reptiles have been documented taking over gopher tortoise (*Gopherus polyphemus*) burrows, and some species such as monitor lizards, are known to feed on tortoise eggs and

hatchlings. Protected sea turtles are also at risk; specifically exotic reptiles may disturb nests and feed on sea turtle eggs and hatchlings. Exotic reptiles may also adversely impact nesting birds including the threatened Florida Scrub-jay (*Aphelocoma coerulescens*) and protected shore birds.

Human Environment

An increasing population of exotic reptiles means increased interactions with humans and the urban environment. Such interactions present certain risks of damage to property and personal health, safety and welfare.

Exotic reptile activity can result in costly damage. They have been documented damaging landscape plants, undermining foundations and shoreline protection structures with their burrows, pose health risks associated with their waste which may carry salmonella bacteria, and the possibility of personal injury to people or their pets (e.g. bites and scratches). Exotic reptiles may also create hazardous conditions for drivers when these large-bodied animals are encountered on roadways. Exotic reptiles have the potential to change the landscape of our beaches and parks, and adversely affect tourism through damage to the beauty of our natural areas.

Exotic Reptile Species in South Florida and Sarasota County

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) currently recognize 48 species of exotic reptiles within the state of Florida. Of these species, 35 have been breeding within Florida for more than 10 years, 10 species have been breeding in Florida for less than 10 years, and 3 species are not known to breed in the wild in Florida. Some species have been known to be present in Florida for over a hundred years (e.g. brown anole [*Anolis sagrei*], since 1887), while other species have invaded more recently (e.g. Nile monitor [*Varanus niloticus*], since 1990s). See the following FWC website for more information:

http://www.myfwc.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/Nonnative_Reptiles_index.htm

The possibility exists that a number of other exotic reptile species not recognized at this time by the FWC may be found in Florida. For example, green anaconda (*Eunectes murinus*), yellow anaconda (*Eunectes notaeus*), reticulated python (*Python reticulatus*), and African rock python (*Python sebae*) have all been recently documented in south Florida, but are currently not included among the species listed on the FWC website above. To this date, the African rock python has been observed twice in Sarasota County.

Table 1 identifies a list of exotic reptile species observed in Sarasota County. It is possible that other species may be added to this list as we learn more about exotic reptiles in our community.

Table 1: Exotic Reptile Species Observed in Sarasota County

Common Name	Scientific Name
Red-eared Slider	<i>Trachemys scripta elegans</i>
Brown Anole	<i>Anolis sagrei</i>
Black Spiny Tail Iguana	<i>Ctenosaura similis</i>
Common House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>

Table 1: Exotic Reptile Species Observed in Sarasota County continued

Common Name	Scientific Name
Mediterranean Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus turcicus</i>
Common Green Iguana	<i>Iguana iguana</i>
Ashy Gecko	<i>Sphaerodactylus elegans</i>
Tokay Gecko	<i>Gekko gekko</i>
Nile Monitor	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>
Burmese Python	<i>Python molurus bivittatus</i>
African Rock Python	<i>Python sebae</i>
Brahminy Blind Snake	<i>Rhamphotyphlops braminus</i>

Target Species

The following exotic reptile species have been verified within Sarasota County and have been identified as primary target species for the purposes of the ERMP due to their adverse impacts to natural systems and potential threat to the public's health, safety and welfare.

Nile Monitor (*Varanus niloticus*)

Among the target exotic reptile species, monitor lizards have been less frequently reported with only a few confirmed sightings throughout Sarasota County.



Figure 1. Adult (Photo provided by Todd Campbell)



Figure 2. Juvenile

Nile Monitor Information	
Native Range	central and south Africa
Color	gray-brown, black or dark olive with yellow spots
Length	adults may reach up to 7 feet
Weight	adults may reach 20 pounds or more
Physical Characteristics	sharp claws for climbing, burrowing and defense; sharp teeth for eating and defense, capable of delivering a painful bite; forked tongue; bacteria in mouth may result in infection
Diet	carnivorous diet includes eggs (including sea turtle and gopher tortoise eggs), birds, mammals, frogs, lizards, snakes, fish and crabs
Sexual Maturity	at approximately 24 months of age
Reproduction	once per year; clutch size of up to 60 eggs; incubation period of 6 to 10 months; peak breeding occurs in the dry season
Lifespan	10-15 years
Behavior	active during the day and can be found in similar areas as described for iguanas above; excellent swimmers and climbers; easily digs underground burrows or invades and expands upon existing burrows; may dive into water or retreat to a burrow when disturbed; normally avoid people but will defend themselves against pets and people that try to catch or corner them; capture of large specimens should be left to professional trappers with experience in handling monitor lizards
Suitable Habitat	mangrove swamps, edges of freshwater and saltwater marshes, and banks of rivers, canals and lakes

Black Spiny Tail Iguana (*Ctenosaura similis*)

Among the target exotic reptile species in Sarasota County, iguanas have been more frequently observed with confirmed sightings mainly on the barrier islands. Two species of exotic iguanas are currently encountered in Sarasota County: black spiny tail iguanas and common green iguanas.



Figure 3. Adult female



Figure 4. Adult male

Black Spiny Tail Iguana Information	
Native Range	Mexico to Central America
Color	grayish-tan in color, with infusions of orange as adults; juveniles are olive-green becoming brownish-gray with black banding as they mature
Length	adults may reach up to 4 feet
Weight	adults may reach up to 5 pounds
Physical Characteristics	males have a more prominent dewlap and longer spines along back; spiny tail with dark dorsal crossbands; sharp claws for climbing, burrowing, and defense; sharp teeth for eating and defense, capable of delivering painful bites and scratches
Diet	herbivores; feed on leaves, flowers and fruit, but do not eat citrus; includes landscape plants, orchids, impatiens, roses, garden greens, squashes, berries, figs, mangos, tomatoes, and many other flowers; adults also consume animal material on a limited basis such as insects, lizards and other small animals, nestling birds and eggs
Sexual Maturity	within 2 to 3 years
Reproduction	once per year in spring; clutch size of up to 30 eggs; incubation period of 3 months
Lifespan	wild lifespan of 8 years, captive lifespan of 20+ years
Behavior	active during the day and bask in open areas, sidewalks, docks, seawalls, or open mowed areas; may dive into water or retreat to a burrow when disturbed; normally avoid people but will defend themselves against pets and people that try to catch or corner them
Suitable Habitat	dunes, coastal hammocks, scrub, barrier islands

Common Green Iguana (*Iguana iguana*)



Figure 5. Adult male



Figure 6. Adult female



Figure 7. Juvenile iguana



Figure 8. Sub-adult

Common Green Iguana Information	
Native Range	southern Mexico to central Brazil and the Caribbean
Color	greenish-grey as an adult with black and olive-green banding along the tail; juveniles have bright green coloration for the first 16 months, and may be confused with juvenile black spiny tail iguanas
Length	adults may reach between 4 to 6 feet
Weight	adults may reach between 15 to 20 pounds
Physical Characteristics	males have a larger head, broader jowls, more prominent dewlap and longer spines along back; whip-like tail; sharp claws for climbing and defense; sharp teeth for eating and defense, capable of delivering painful bites and scratches
Diet	herbivores; feed on leaves, flowers and fruit, but do not eat citrus; includes landscape plants, orchids, impatiens, roses, garden greens, squashes, berries, figs, mangos, tomatoes, and many other flowers; adults also consume animal material on a limited basis such as insects, lizards and other small animals, nestling birds and eggs
Sexual Maturity	within 18 months
Reproduction	once per year during the spring; clutch size of up to 45 eggs; incubation period of 3 months
Lifespan	wild lifespan of approximately 8 years, captive lifespan of 20+ years
Behavior	active during the day and bask in open areas, sidewalks, docks, seawalls, or open mowed areas; may dive into water or retreat to a burrow when disturbed; normally avoid people but will defend themselves against pets and people that try to catch or corner them
Suitable Habitat	dunes, coastal hammocks, scrub, barrier islands

Burmese Python (*Python molorus bivittatus*)



Figure 9. Adult

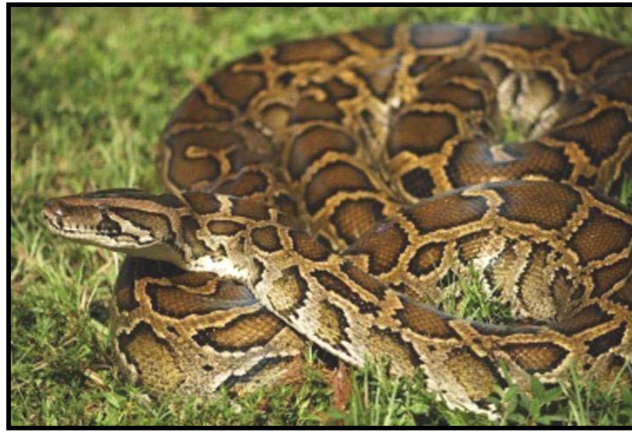


Figure 10. Adult

Among the exotic snake species found in south Florida, Burmese pythons have become well-established within the Everglades and have been found in many south Florida counties. In Sarasota County, Burmese pythons have been rarely reported with only a few confirmed sightings from the eastern and southern portions of the County.

Burmese Python Information	
Native Range	throughout Southeast Asia
Color	light-colored with many brown blotches bordered in black
Length	adults may reach up to 20 feet
Weight	adults may weigh up to 160 pounds
Physical Characteristics	non-venomous constrictor; large body size poses a threat to pets and humans
Diet	various birds, mammals, reptiles, frogs, fish, etc.
Sexual Maturity	in one year, at approximately 8.5 feet in length
Reproduction	once per year, clutch size of up to 36 eggs; incubation period of 2 months
Lifespan	wild lifespan of approximately 10 years, captive lifespan of 20+ years
Behavior	primarily nocturnal; semi-aquatic (may stay underwater easily for up to 30 minutes); arboreal (adapted for living and moving about in trees)
Suitable Habitat	wet grasslands, rivers, mangrove forests and coastal plains

Exotic Reptile Sightings

For a map of all target species sightings, see Appendix A - Sarasota County Exotic Reptile Sightings.

Existing Regulatory Framework

Florida has recognized the potential for non-native species to adversely affect natural systems. As a result, the legislature adopted Florida Administrative Code (FAC), Rule 68-5.001 FAC, Introduction of Non-Native Species into the State (Appendix B).

The FWC defines “non-native” as species that are free-ranging and were not found in Florida before the year 1500. It is illegal to release any non-native animal in the state of Florida, and non-native animals are not protected in the state of Florida, except by anti-cruelty laws (Title XLVI. Crimes. Chapter 828. Animals: Cruelty; Sales; Animal Enterprise Protection).

According to the FAC, it is unlawful “to possess, transport or otherwise bring into the state or to release or introduce in the state any freshwater fish, aquatic invertebrate, marine plant, marine animal, or wild animal life that is not native to the state unless such person shall first secure a permit from the Commission.” Violation of this rule is a first degree misdemeanor punishable by a fine of up to \$1,000 and imprisonment of up to one year.

EXOTIC REPTILE MANAGEMENT PLAN

The following goals, objectives, and actions have been developed in order to gain a better understanding of the exotic reptile populations in Sarasota County and to use that information to manage populations effectively. The ERMP establishes a comprehensive approach to address this emerging threat through the utilization of adaptive management principles. Adaptive management principles are dynamic in nature and acknowledge that management strategies may change as new information becomes available. Monitoring and research are essential elements of adaptive management.

GOAL 1.0 Population Monitoring

Gain a better understanding of the exotic reptile abundance and distribution in Sarasota County.

Objective 1.0

Monitor exotic reptile populations to determine the extent of the distribution in Sarasota County and identify population concentrations. The information will provide a better understanding of this emerging issue and help identify opportunities to control the spread of target species of exotic reptiles in Sarasota County.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the extent of the problem, Sarasota County seeks assistance from staff and residents to report exotic reptile sightings throughout the County.

Action 1.0

County staff will be trained to report sightings of exotic reptiles and will maintain an up-to-date geographic information systems (GIS) map that will assist the County in evaluating the extent of the exotic reptile invasion. This map will include sightings that have occurred on both public and private lands. Staff sightings will be reported to the Call Center at (941) 861-5000 or via the County's Exotic Reptile website:

<http://www.scgov.net/EnvironmentalServices/ResourceProtection/Reptiles.asp>

Action 1.1

Sarasota County encourages citizens to participate in and contribute to population monitoring efforts. Citizen sightings may be reported to the Call Center at (941) 861-5000 or by completing the Exotic Reptile Sighting Report form available at the Exotic Reptile website:

<http://www.scgov.net/EnvironmentalServices/ResourceProtection/Reptiles.asp>

GOAL 2.0 Public Outreach and Education

Inform the community of the emerging issue of exotic reptiles and create opportunities for public/private partnerships.

Objective 2.0

Provide education for the community to assist in achieving the goals of the ERMP.

Effective implementation of the management plan is dependent upon the accuracy of information collected. This presents a challenge since accurate identification of reptiles can be difficult for many reasons, such as similarities between species, limited knowledge of the diversity of reptiles, or having only a brief glimpse of the animal or portion of the animal. Reptile sightings, and those of snakes in particular, are also prone to exaggerated “fish tales” when reporting the size, pattern, color, or length. In order to assist in the management of the target species of exotic reptiles, education is an instrumental component of this management plan.

Action Item 2.1

Sarasota County will develop and implement an education plan that may include the following formats: print, digital, website, public speaking events, etc. The website below has been created to assist in the delivery of this information to the public:

<http://www.scgov.net/EnvironmentalServices/ResourceProtection/Reptiles.asp>

Action Item 2.2

Sarasota County will develop and implement an education and training program for its employees. This program will focus on training field staff to identify exotic reptiles and report sightings. An identification guide will be developed and provided to field staff and will be available on-line for the public.

GOAL 3.0 Removal Activities

Reduce the population of target species of exotic reptiles in Sarasota County.

As stewards of public lands, the County is responsible for managing those lands for the health of natural systems, public health, safety and welfare, and for recreation. With regard to exotic reptiles, this includes management of the target species in order to reduce risk, costs, and adverse environmental impacts.

Objective 3.0

Reduce the population of target species of exotic reptiles in Sarasota County to protect the public health, safety, and welfare, and to reduce adverse environmental impacts.

Objective 3.1

Reduce the population of target species of exotic reptiles in Sarasota County to protect natural resources, native habitats and wildlife.

Action Item 3.0

The County will implement a removal program on public lands where there is documented utilization by exotic reptiles. Concentrated removal efforts on County-owned lands will have a concurrent benefit for adjoining private property owners by reducing the local population and source of animals capable of dispersing and expanding their distribution in Sarasota County.

County-owned lands include: Environmentally Sensitive Lands, parks, beaches and natural areas, utilities, County office buildings and facilities, landfill, and other property holdings.

Priorities for management and removal of the target species of exotic reptiles will be based on the following (in no particular order):

- Documented breeding populations of exotic reptiles.
- Areas where exotic reptiles may adversely affect the public safety, health and welfare.
- Areas where exotic reptiles pose a threat to protected wildlife species (e.g. sea turtles, scrub-jays, gopher tortoises).
- Areas where exotic reptiles pose a threat to native habitats (e.g. dune, coastal hammock, Myakka River, wetlands, scrub, Indian mounds, and coastal shorelines).

Based on the above-listed criteria, the following sites have been preliminarily identified as priority management sites:

Iguanas

- Manasota Key – Blind Pass Park and the Hermitage*

- Englewood – Lemon Bay Park
- Venice – Shamrock Park and Nature Center
- Siesta Key – Palmer Point Park, Turtle Beach Park

*Blind Pass Park and the Hermitage has been identified as a high priority site due to its elevated concentration of breeding iguanas and threats to protected wildlife species, native habitats, and the public safety, health and welfare.

Pythons

- Deer Prairie Creek Preserve
- Myakka River corridor, along River Road

Action Item 3.1

The County may employ trapping and/or humane removal to manage exotic reptile populations. All management activities will be consistent with applicable state regulations and guidelines, including but not limited to Florida Administrative Code (FAC), Rule 68-5.001 FAC.

A professional trapper will be responsible for the majority of removal activities. While on site, the trapper(s) conducting management activities will implement avoidance and minimization measures to maintain public safety. Such measures may include:

- Closing sections of the property to the public
- Wearing easily identifiable clothing
- Conducting activities during non-peak days and hours (not during holidays, special events, etc.)
- Notifying the Sheriff's office and 911 operators of removal activities
- Notifying neighbors of removal activities

Action Item 3.2

The County will explore development of a Rapid Response Team for target snake species on public and private property. On-call members of the Rapid Response Team could detain the snake or track movements until such time as a professional wildlife trapper can remove the animal.

Action Item 3.3

The County will educate and encourage private property owners to manage and reduce populations of exotic reptiles on their property.

The County will not take action on private property to remove exotic reptiles. Private property owners have the option to remove exotic reptiles on private lands in a manner similar to the removal of other nuisance or non-native wildlife (e.g. wild hogs, armadillos, raccoons, etc.). In these similar scenarios, County staff generally advises private landowners to hire a professional wildlife trapper to address removal. Private

property owners should refer to the Exotic Reptile website for further information and an updated list of wildlife trappers.

The County does not recommend that the general public attempt to remove exotic reptiles from their private property without professional assistance. These animals can be dangerous. However, if an exotic reptile is on private property and is already contained (e.g. inside a home or pool cage, inside a trash can, etc.), Sarasota County Animal Services may be contacted to collect the animal.

Action Item 3.3.1

The County encourages private property owners to implement the goals of the ERMP by following the Homeowner's Guide to Exotic Reptiles. This information is available in Appendix C and at the County website:

<http://www.scgov.net/EnvironmentalServices/ResourceProtection/Reptiles.asp>

Action Item 3.3.2

The County will explore collaborative opportunities for an amnesty program for exotic reptile owners to surrender unwanted animals.

GOAL 4.0 Research Opportunities

The County will explore opportunities to learn more about these exotic reptile species, what impacts they may be having on our local environment, and how we may be able to better control their spread in our area.

Objective 4.0

Obtain data and perform analysis on the exotic reptiles to gain an understanding of the biology of the target species in Sarasota County.

Action Item 4.0

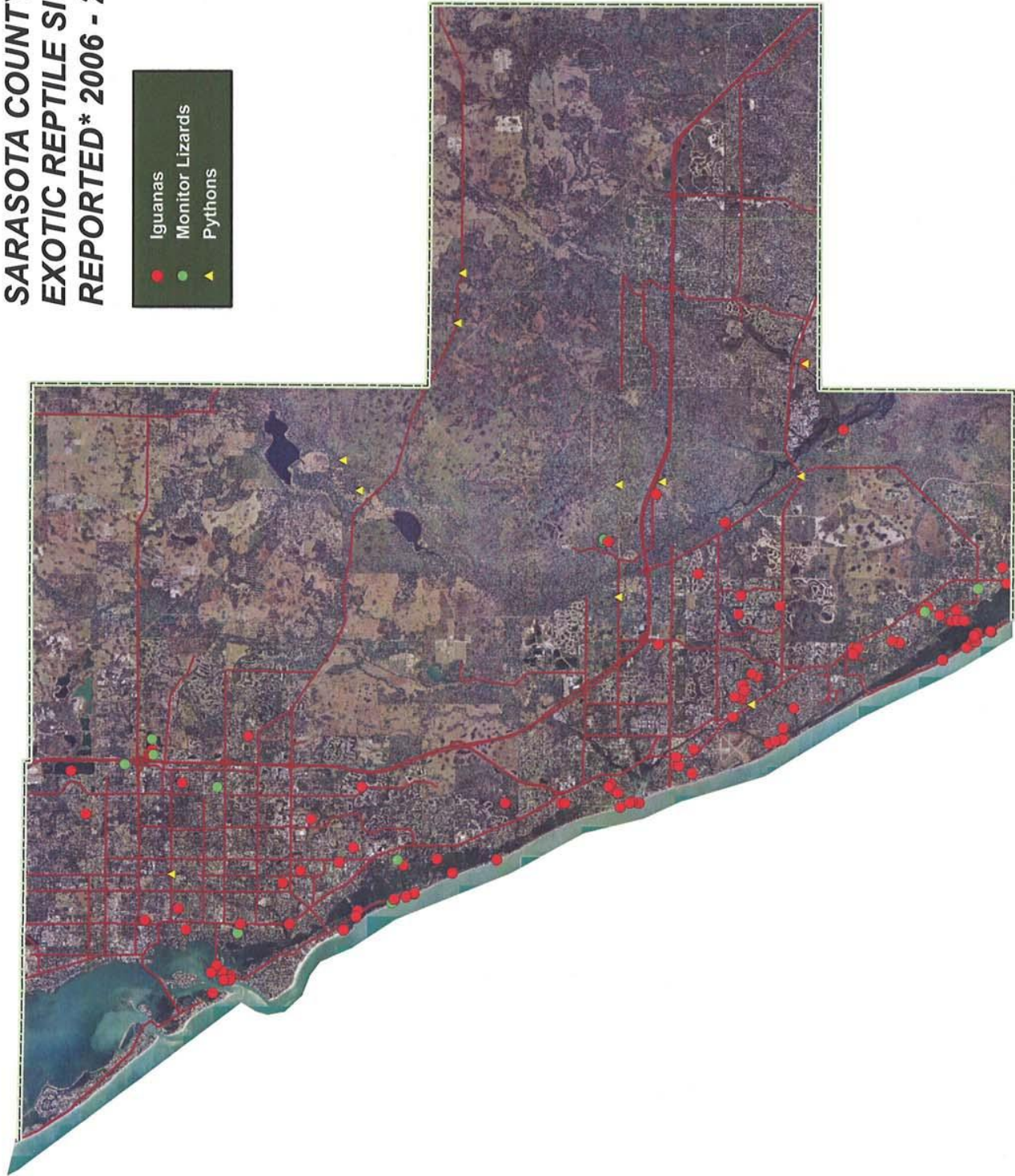
Explore opportunities to collaborate with universities and research institutions to gain a better understanding of these exotic species.

Research opportunities may include:

- Local life history
- Diet
- Interactions with other species

Appendix A

SARASOTA COUNTY EXOTIC REPTILE SIGHTINGS REPORTED* 2006 - 2009



*All reported sightings are shown including confirmed/unconfirmed reports.

Appendix B

State Rules, 68-5.001 Florida Administrative Code

68-5.001 Introduction of Non-native Species into the State.

(1) No person shall transport into the state, introduce, or possess, for any purpose that might reasonably be expected to result in liberation into the state, any freshwater fish, aquatic invertebrate, marine plant, marine animal, or wild animal life not native to the state, without having secured a permit from the Commission, except:

- (a) Fathead minnow (*Pimephales promelas*).
- (b) Variable platy (*Xiphophorus variatus*).
- (c) Coturnix quail (*Coturnix coturnix*).
- (d) Ring-necked pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*).

(2) Conditional Non-native Species – The species or hybrids or eggs thereof listed in Rule 68-5.002, F.A.C., may be possessed only pursuant to permit issued by the Executive Director, with the following restrictions:

(a) Such permits will be issued only to individuals or institutions engaged in research, or to commercial import or export businesses, public aquaria, public zoological parks, or public exhibitors providing educational exhibits. Permits shall not be issued for display of these species in private aquaria, private zoological parks, or for personal possession.

(b) Prior to the issuance of a permit to possess conditional non-native species, facilities where conditional species are to be kept and waters where their use is intended may be inspected by Commission personnel to assure that adequate safeguards exist to prevent escape or accidental release into the waters of the state.

(c) Permits for conditional freshwater fish and aquatic invertebrate species may be issued by the Commission subject to the following:

1. Conditional freshwater fish and aquatic invertebrate species held outdoors may only be held in a water body that has the lowest point of the top edge of its levee, dike, bank, or tank at an elevation of at least one foot above the 100-year flood elevation determined by reference to elevation maps issued by the National Flood Insurance Program, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Such water body shall have no water discharge or shall be constructed with a barrier system designed to prevent escape of adults, juveniles, and eggs in the water effluent discharged from the permittee's property. Public visitation at facilities in possession of conditional non-native species shall occur only under supervision of the permittee or his/her designee.

2. Conditional freshwater fish and aquatic invertebrate species held indoors may only be held in culture systems having no water discharge, having a water discharge through a closed drain system, or other system designed to prevent discharge of water containing adults, juveniles and eggs from the permittee's property.

3. Any person engaged in aquaculture who possesses a valid certificate of registration from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services issued pursuant to Chapter 597, F.S., and who is authorized to possess such species in accordance with Chapter 597, F.S., is not required to obtain the permit.

4. Conditional aquatic turtle species:

a. Outdoor facilities must have a permanent containment barrier secured at least six inches below ground level to prevent escape by digging or erosion. Such barriers may be constructed of solid board, or metal or plank fencing, and may not use mesh material.

b. All eggs must be removed daily from outdoor facilities.

(3) Prohibited Non-native Species – No person shall import into the state, sell, possess, or transport any live specimens of the species or hybrids or eggs thereof listed in Rule 68-5.003, F.A.C., except as provided in paragraphs (a) and (b) below:

(a) Public aquaria, zoological parks, or public exhibitors with current accreditation by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association or the American Association of Museums will be granted a permit.

(b) Individuals or institutions engaged in research will be granted such a permit, provided the following requirements are met:

1. A detailed research proposal shall accompany the application for the research permit. The proposal shall state with particularity research objectives, methodology and study duration, and outline planned safeguards to assure proper containment of the species.

2. All research on prohibited aquatic species shall be conducted in indoor facilities in containers having no water discharge or having a water discharge through a closed drain system that terminates in a dry-bed wastewater pond.

3. All research on prohibited terrestrial wildlife species shall be conducted in indoor facilities in cages or other confinement facilities to prevent escape.

4. The research permit shall expire 12 months from the date of issuance and shall not be renewed until a detailed report of research findings is received and approved by the Commission. The report shall include a description of activities undertaken in the permit period, progress toward research project objectives, and proposed additional activities to be undertaken during any renewal

period. Such reports are public records subject to the requirements for public disclosure under Chapter 119, F.S.

(4) No permits shall be granted for possession of any species of piranha or pirambéba (subfamily Serrasalminae).

(5) Possession of sea snakes (Family Hydrophiidae, all species) is limited to public aquaria, public zoological parks, or public exhibitors with current accreditation by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association or the American Association of Museums, providing educational exhibits, for public exhibition purposes only, under the following conditions:

(a) Only male sea snakes may be possessed.

(b) A public aquarium, zoological park, or public exhibitor possessing sea snakes shall not be located in a coastal county and shall have no contiguous connection with any waters of the state.

(c) Each public aquarium, public zoological park, or public exhibitor possessing sea snakes shall provide quarterly reports to the Commission regarding the number of each species of sea snakes on the premises and any changes in inventory resulting from death or additions by importation.

(d) Sea snakes shall not be released into the waters of the state.

(e) Each public aquarium, zoological park, or public exhibitor possessing sea snakes shall post with the Commission a \$1 million letter of credit. The letter of credit shall be in favor of the State of Florida, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, for use by the Commission to remove any sea snake accidentally or intentionally introduced into waters of the state. The letter of credit shall be written in the form determined by the Commission. The letter of credit shall provide that the zoological park or aquarium is responsible for the sea snakes within that facility and shall be in effect at all times that the zoological park or aquarium possesses sea snakes.

(f) No person or public aquarium, public zoological park, or public exhibitor shall barter, sell, or trade sea snakes within this state.

(g) A public aquarium, public zoological park, or public exhibitor that imports sea snakes pursuant to this subsection may bring the sea snakes into this state only by airplane that may land only at an airport located in a non-coastal county within this state.

(h) A public aquarium, public zoological park, or public exhibitor possessing sea snakes pursuant to this subsection shall abide by all regulatory requirements of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission with respect to venomous reptiles.

(6) No leopard tortoise (*Geochelone pardalis*), African spurred tortoise (*Geochelone sulcata*), or Bell's hingeback tortoise (*Kinixys belliana*) shall be imported or transported into this state, without a special permit issued by the Commission. The basis for the issuance of such permit shall include:

(a) That each shipment is accompanied by a veterinary certificate stating that all specimens are free from external parasites;

(b) That all shipping containers used to transport such tortoises are incinerated within 24 hours;

(c) Such other conditions as may be necessary to ensure that no tortoise infested with ticks capable of transmitting the Heartwater disease is imported into Florida.

(7) No person shall allow or permit any freshwater aquatic organism not native to the state to remain in the waters of any propagating pool or pond that is no longer maintained or operated for the production of such non-native species. The presence of any species designated in Rule 68-5.002 or 68-5.003, F.A.C., in any propagating pool or pond shall constitute possession by the owner or operator of the pool or pond.

(8) Unless otherwise specifically provided in Titles 68A through 68E, F.A.C., all species of freshwater aquatic life and wild animal life not native to Florida may be taken throughout the year, without restrictions.

Specific Authority Art. IV, Sec. 9, Fla. Const. Law Implemented Art. IV, Sec. 9, Fla. Const. History—New 6-7-07.

Homeowner's Guide to Exotic Reptiles



What can you do to help control exotic reptiles in Sarasota County?

- If you see an exotic reptile (e.g.: iguana, monitor, python), call the Sarasota County Call Center at 941-861-5000 or fill out a sighting form found on the county's Exotic Reptile website to report it. This information will be used to map and monitor the population as well as identify opportunities to control the spread of exotic non-native reptiles.
- Do not install landscape plants that are known to attract certain exotic reptiles such as iguanas, or consider removing them if they are currently in your landscape. For example: hibiscus, orchids, impatiens, roses, garden greens, squashes, berries, figs, mangos, tomatoes, and many other flowers are known to be eaten by iguanas.
- If you want to keep your plants and help control these animals, protect your favorite plants with enclosures and netting. Otherwise, they may become a reptile snack.
- When considering the purchase of an exotic reptile for a pet, know the facts. How big will it be? What does it eat? How much space do I need to house it? Will I still be able to care for it when it's fully grown? Often these realities are not fully understood at the time of purchase and the pet soon becomes an unwanted burden that the owner does not know how to handle.
- Do not release unwanted pets into the wild. Not only is this against the law in the state of Florida, it adds to the problem of exotic animals spreading and competing with our native animals for resources. In addition, it is also cruel to the animal released, as it must then fend for itself in the wild in unfamiliar territory.
- As with dogs and cats, you can get a microchip for your reptile. If it gets out and is found later, this microchip will enable Sarasota County Animal Services to return it to you.
- If you have an exotic reptile that you can no longer care for, you may surrender it to Animal Services. You may also consider contacting your veterinarian for other options.

