

CONSERVATION FACT SHEET



Rapid Response to Florida's Invasive Non-native Reptiles and Amphibians

South Florida's sub-tropical climate is quite welcoming to many different non-native reptile and amphibian species. The implications on the environment for newly introduced species are largely unknown. Zoo Miami works with federal, state, county, university and non-profit organization staff to discover, study and remove these newly emerging species invading our region. As staff conducts field work, we carefully observe, document and report any unusual species occurrences. Organized cooperative survey and removal efforts are conducted on newly discovered populations. As these reptiles are removed from the environment, their possible effects on the environment are simultaneously assessed to evaluate the implications if eradication is not possible.

Invasive species can prey on and displace native species, spread disease, spread parasites, damage environments, and encourage other invasive species spread. Not all of these invaders may present a threat to our native species. But, taking action during the early stages after detection is more cost effective and may be able to stop a harmful species from becoming established. The unfortunate consequences of several historic introductions are well documented and may have been avoided and saved resources if organized actions had been taken during early detections. Zoo Miami hopes to stay on the front lines of this fight to protect South Florida's habitats and native species against these invaders. Zoo Miami also possesses the expert staff and relationships to try and provide responsible placement for many of these species obtained through removal efforts.

Zoo Miami staff participates in multi-agency Burmese and African Rock Python surveys and removal efforts in the region. Our staff conducts trapping and radiotelemetry tracking of Argentine Black and White Tegus to try and discover how widespread this species has become and what this omnivorous species is consuming in the natural landscape. This species has become a great concern to biologists due to its quick spread, large size, wide array of prey and high reproductive rate. A couple species of introduced chameleons are also being surveyed, studied and monitored to learn about possible implications to our native arboreal species if they would become established in natural areas. There are always new species being discovered each year that require a response and action to avoid another harmful species from becoming established.