

BROWARD COUNTY WEB PAGE

Iguanas can cause damage by eating valuable landscape plants, shrubs, and trees, as well as orchids and many other flowers. They can also dig burrows next to seawalls and foundations, increasing the chance of erosion and eventual collapse. The droppings of iguanas along decks and docks and sometimes in swimming pools is also a frequent complaint.

Although green iguanas are not native to Florida, they are thriving in the warm South Florida climate. Iguanas are typically not aggressive, but they will defend themselves against pets and against people who try to catch or corner them. Iguanas can bite, scratch, or strike with their powerful tails. Since they are mostly herbivorous (plant eating), iguanas are probably here to stay. Our multidisciplinary working group has the following recommendations to allow us to coexist with these fascinating reptiles. As with all wildlife, iguanas are protected by anticruelty laws, and inhumane treatment of them is punishable by law.

How To Discourage Iguanas

Exclusion

- Never feed iguanas.



- Protect plants with cages or screen enclosures.
- Use iguana-resistant plants such as citrus, milkweed, pigeon plum, oleanders, coonties, etc., in your landscape.
- Install sheet-metal cylinders approximately 18 inches from the base of trees to prevent iguanas from climbing.
- Create an L-shaped wire barrier along the bottom of seawalls and other fixed objects to prevent iguanas from digging underneath.

Habitat Modification

- Avoid planting iguana favorites such as hibiscus, orchids, impatiens, roses, garden greens, melons, etc.
- Remove protective cover such as dense thickets and piles of landscape timber or rocks.
- Fill vacant burrows with rocks.

Humane Discouragement

- Keep a water hose ready and available to spray basking iguanas on pool decks or boats.
- A startling noise will also create an unwelcome atmosphere for a sunning iguana that feels a bit too much at home poolside.
- Hang CDs near seawalls or dangle them like wind chimes from trees or prized plants. Their reflective surfaces often scare away iguanas.

Resources

For more tips and information on coexisting with iguanas, visit these Websites:

- [Animal Care](#)
- [University of Florida IFAS Extension](#)
- [Wildlife Care Center](#) (adoptable iguanas are also available through this site)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I get rid of iguanas in my yard?

If you call in a wildlife trapper to remove an iguana, another will soon take its place. It is more effective to make your yard iguana resistant. There are a number of steps you can take to iguana-proof your yard.

- **Exclusion:** Install caged screen enclosures to protect your pool and yard. Install electric fencing around your yard, seawall and docks. Use sheet metal guards on trees and dock pilings to keep iguanas from climbing. Keep iguanas off your

New book:

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Available at your

boat by tying plastic bottles on the lines. Protect your pool deck with childproof fencing. Use wire mesh screening to protect garden plants.

- **Habitat Modification:** Remove fruit trees (except citrus, which they do not eat) and flowering plants from your yard. Remove dense thickets, piles of landscape timber and rocks. Trim bushes and trees away from your house, pool, seawall and dock. Fill vacant burrows with cement and sand.
- **Repellent:** Spray a protective border around your yard or plants using neem oil or garlic spray. Iguanas do not like the smell and taste of these nontoxic biopesticides.
- **Capture:** Special permits are unnecessary for trapping iguanas on private property. However, wildlife must be trapped humanely. Only snares (like noose poles and nets) and live traps are legal in Florida. Traps must be checked at least once every 24 hours because leaving a wild animal in a trap for longer is considered animal abuse.

Iguanas are not easy to capture, but during cold spells they do slow down. If you capture an iguana, you cannot let it loose in a nearby park, lake, canal or undeveloped area. To do so is a misdemeanor subject to jail time and a fine. You must either keep the iguana as a pet, find someone who will do so, or arrange to have it euthanized.

Can I shoot an iguana on my property?

In the state of Florida, it is not legal to shoot firearms or pellet rifles in cities or suburbs. Most people are not that good a shot with an air gun or a bow and arrow that they can kill a fast-moving iguana with a single shot. If you shoot an iguana with either of these weapons and it fails to die right away, you can be arrested for animal cruelty.

It is legal to trap iguanas on private property using a humane method, but it is illegal to transport and abandon them elsewhere in the state. See the [Laws](#) page.

Do some cultures eat iguanas? What do they taste like?

In the South American and Central American countries where iguanas are native species, iguana meat is eaten and enjoyed. In addition to native predators, hunters help to keep the iguana populations in check. The meat of iguanas supposedly tastes similar to chicken but with a gamey reptilian taste. In

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[Barnes&Noble.com](https://www.barnesandnoble.com),
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some parts of the world, iguanas are called "bamboo chickens."

Why are there suddenly so many iguanas in South Florida?

The three species of iguana found in Florida (Common Green Iguana, Mexican Spinytail Iguana, and Black Spinytail Iguana) have been around for decades. However, over the past few years, their populations have exploded.

Wildlife scientists who study exotic species use a statistic they call "the rule of ten": One in ten exotic animals escape into the wild; one in ten of the escapees survive to establish a breeding population; and one in ten of the established exotics become pests. Since so few (statistically) escape, and fewer actually survive, this slows down the population growth initially. But for those species that do manage to escape and survive and thrive, the gradual swell in population eventually begins to increase exponentially as the number of breeding pairs grows with each generation.

So, for years most of us did not even notice the iguanas among us. Now we are practically tripping over them. State biologists estimate their numbers in the hundreds of thousands.

These large reptiles have adapted well to Florida habitat, they breed more than once a year, and they can live 15 to 20 years in the wild. So there's no stopping them now. Only unusually long, very cold winter seasons can help trim the massive iguana population in South Florida.

What happens to feral iguanas living in the wild in Florida when it gets cold?

The three species of iguana living and breeding on their own in Florida are only able to survive in the year-round warmth of the southern areas of the state. They are unable to withstand the colder temperatures which occur on a regular basis in areas north of Orlando. In South Florida, where the population of Green Iguanas was estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands by the end of 2009, it took a couple of weeks of unseasonably cold weather to significantly reduce

their numbers.

When the temperature drops down into the 40s and below, something which happens only occasionally in the areas where feral iguanas live and breed, these cold-blooded reptiles become sluggish. Iguanas do not manufacture their own body heat and, when cold, their naturally slow metabolism is reduced even more until they may appear to be in a near-comatose state. If they are hiding in trees, iguanas may fall off branches. They will lie frozen, in a state of suspended animation, and will be unresponsive to touch.

Once the sun comes out, iguanas gradually emerge from this semi-dormant state. Some will crawl out into the street to warm themselves on the sun-splashed asphalt, only to get hit by passing cars. Others will turn black from the stress of enduring a crisis state. This darkening of the skin will help to increase heat absorption when they return to basking in the sun. If the weather remains warm, the iguanas can recover. But when cold weather lasts for more than a few days in a row, like it did in January 2010, many iguanas cannot survive. The ones that do, however, will breed. This means that the population of feral iguanas in Florida is only temporarily reduced.

Can we reduce the iguana population in Florida by destroying their nests?

Wild iguanas dig deep burrows for nesting in sand and soil. At the bottom of these burrows the female will create a small cavern in which she can lay her eggs. Tunnels may connect a number of separate burrows so that more than one entrance will lead to the same nesting cavern. Such shared caverns are usually deeper in the ground and better protected than a nest used by a single female.

Female iguanas back out of their nest after their eggs are laid. Then they cover the nest with sand or dirt. Different iguanas will use a single nest sequentially. An iguana will return to a nest site season after season. Sometimes the females will fight over ownership of a nest site. Unless such competition is occurring, however, female iguanas do not stay by their nests to guard their eggs.

If you have an unguarded nest on your property, you can certainly help to reduce the local iguana population by removing the eggs. Be sure to freeze them in order to halt development, then discard or bury. Do not use iguana eggs as fertilizer in gardens with plants you plan to eat, as the eggs may carry salmonella bacteria. Also, wear gloves when handling iguana eggs.

You can also choose to fill in iguana burrows when you find them on your property. You can use cement if the burrows are located in a seawall or foundation. Otherwise, gravel makes a good filler. Be sure not to fill in occupied burrows as this is inhumane.

Population control is one way to have an influence on the exploding non-native Green Iguana population in South Florida. Wildlife biologists have suggested that pet sales in the state be limited to infertile iguanas. This measure would prevent future additions to the expanding population but would not address the hundreds of thousands of exotic Green Iguanas on the loose--and breeding--all over South Florida.

What is the best way to capture an iguana?

Licensed wildlife trappers typically use a live trap or a catch pole to capture feral iguanas. Trappers are trained how to capture wild animals without hurting them--or getting injured themselves. If you feel you must capture a wild reptile on your property, the best option is to contact an experienced wildlife trapper. Look for a service that specializes in iguanas.

Do-it-yourself homeowners should stick to live traps. Havahart traps are safe and will not hurt or maim animals. A large trap (32 inches x 10 inches by 12 inches) is best as the smaller versions will be inadequate for the four- to six-foot long Green Iguanas. The large Havahart traps cost \$65 to \$125.

The live trap should be set in an area where iguanas regularly come and go, like on a seawall or along a fence line. Bait can include fresh ripe fruit like bananas and mango. (Flowers and greens are fine for feeding iguanas but do not seem to lure them into traps.) Unless you plan to check the trap every few

hours, cover the top of the cage with burlap or other cloth to provide shade and privacy. By law, the trap must be checked every 24 hours. It is inhumane to leave trapped animals in cages for long periods.

Once you capture an iguana, you must take full responsibility for this feral animal. You can keep it as a pet, give it to someone else who wants to keep it as a pet, or euthanize it in a humane manner sanctioned by the state. (To study the sanctioned methods, check the American Veterinary Medical Association Guidelines on Euthanasia, 2007.) Be sure to wear heavy gloves when handling the trap or moving the animal. As long as the iguana is in your possession, you must feed it once a day.

If you choose to capture an iguana, do not assume your pest problem is over. Another iguana will be attracted to your property for the same reasons as the captured one, and soon enough you will be setting your trap for the new invader. In South Florida, iguana trapping is a perpetual job, one that may last a lifetime.

How can I find a wildlife trapper who will come to my house and get rid of the iguanas in my yard?

Most wildlife trappers in South Florida will tell you not to waste your money hiring them to come try to catch iguanas on your property. It is quite difficult to trap an iguana, and as soon as one is removed from your land, another will take its place. Most Florida wildlife trappers advise callers to iguana-proof their yards instead.

Licensed wildlife trappers are listed online, in the Yellow Pages, and on the [Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission website](#).

Is it okay to feed the iguanas that come on my property?

Iguanas eat lots of plants, leaves and flowers, fruits and shoots. Some consume insects and eggs. In the wild, they are capable of finding the nutrients they require to stay healthy. You should never feed them junk food. If you are leaving food out in your yard for the iguanas, be aware that you will be attracting other undesirable pests (like rats) onto your

property.

Once you begin to feed the local iguanas, they will come to rely on you for food. They will troop to your yard daily and their friends will follow suit. This may enrage any neighbors attempting to keep iguanas out of their yards. Be prepared to defend your actions. Neighborhood arguments about exotic wildlife are increasingly common in Florida.

What should I do if I see what I think is a Nile Monitor lizard, a tegu or a Spectacled Caiman in my neighborhood?

Bring your pets and children inside at once. Call 911 and report your sighting. Then keep an eye on the animal so you can tell the trappers when they arrive exactly where it is located. Do not approach the animal.

You can report your sighting to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on their Exotic Nuisance Species hotline: nas.er.usgs.gov.

What should I do if I see a giant boa or python in my neighborhood?

Bring your pets and children inside at once. Call 911 and report your sighting. Then keep an eye on the animal so you can tell the trappers where the snake is located. Do not approach the animal.

You can report your sighting to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission on their Exotic Nuisance Species hotline: nas.er.usgs.gov.

What products can we buy to help us keep exotic pests off our property?

Neem oil is a nontoxic biopesticide made from the seed oil of a species of evergreen tree which grows in the tropics. The taste of this oil is bitter and the smell is an unpleasant garlic-nut odor. Iguanas do not like either the taste or the smell. You can create boundaries around your yard or garden using neem oil. You can spray your pool deck and dock with the oil to repel the iguanas. Garlic spray may also work for the same

reasons. You will need to spray on a monthly basis, more often during rainy season.

Iguana-Rid combines neem oil with red pepper and garlic. Do not spray directly on plants or the red pepper may dry out the leaves.

Coyote Pee is another product some users claim will repel iguanas. Animals tend to stay away from territories that have been “tagged” by the urine of their predators. Coyote Pee may keep iguanas out of your yard if you use the product according to package directions.

To keep iguanas off your roof, try Fly-Bye. The steel prongs are used to protect rooftops from birds.

Many different companies offer caged screen enclosures, childproof fencing for pools, electric fencing for yards, seawalls and docks, sheet metal guards for trees, and wire mesh to protect gardens from wildlife.

The best investment you can make is to **not** buy an exotic pet. The pet choices we make today will help to influence the environment we live in tomorrow.

Do exotic pets carry diseases dangerous to humans?

Yes. Not all pets have diseases, and humans are not susceptible to every disease an animal may carry. However, the saliva, urine and feces of many exotic species can prove to be a source of potentially dangerous pathogens. Pets have been known to cause illnesses and deaths from relatively rare diseases such as plague, tularemia, monkeypox, and hepatitis. In many cases, the animals are carriers and do not display symptoms of disease. For example, iguana droppings can carry salmonella bacteria but this does not make the iguanas ill.

Hands should always be washed carefully and thoroughly after handling exotic pets and the “calling cards” of nuisance exotics. Bites and scratches should be treated by a doctor.

How can I get rid of my unwanted exotic pet? It was such a cute baby when we bought it, but now I feel like

dumping it in the woods (or the lake or the canal) because it has grown too large and too expensive for me to keep.

Abandoning your exotic pet is against the law. There are a number of better choices.

See if one of your friends wants to take on the care of your pet. Call the pet shop where you purchased the animal and see if they might take it back (but don't expect them to pay you for it). You can offer to donate your pet to a local zoo or animal park. Ask your veterinarian if he or she can recommend a new home for your pet.

Florida hosts Exotic Pet Amnesty Days (<http://www.myfwc.com/>) in various locations around the state. You can take your unwanted pet to this day-long event and turn it in. The sponsors will give your animal a checkup and, if it is healthy, they will find an adoptive home for your pet.

Next time you're thinking about buying a pet, do the research first. Find out how big the animal will get, what it eats, how long it lives. Find out if the animal becomes aggressive when maturing. Pet responsibility can be lifelong. Your choice of pet is an important one.

So is there a solution to Florida's iguana problem? Is there *anything* we can do to help solve the other exotic species problems in Florida or in any other state?

The real problem is, *once we begin to see exotic animals in our parks and lakes, their populations are already significant*. If the invasive species population is small, it can be eradicated if attended to early enough. With a large population, however, this becomes impossible unless the habitat where the species is found is clearly defined by boundaries that enable trappers to corner wild animals. Trappers working on small islands or in parks surrounded by busy streets have a better chance than those attempting to reduce a non-native population living and breeding in an undefined area like a neighborhood--or a state.

This does not mean that there is nothing we can do to help with the exotic species problem. We can certainly become

aware of the problem and develop a better understanding of the nature of the issue. We can avoid buying exotic animals and, if we own such pets, we can make sure they never get loose. We can write to our legislators about the exotic species invading our state and ask them for the legislation we need to eliminate the breeding and sale of exotic species as pets. And we can talk about the issues with our neighbors and friends, spreading the word that exotic pets on the loose can pose a serious threat to our fragile ecosystem as well as our health and safety.

The exotic species problem is also *a kind of cruelty to animals*, as we introduce foreign animals to the natural habitats of our native animals. This is unfair to the non-natives who belong elsewhere and will be persecuted and killed, as well as to the native species ill-equipped to deal with the invasives who will eventually outcompete them for food and territory. Nobody wins in this situation, except for those who blindly profit from the sales of exotic animals.

PETS GONE WILD AND THE LAW

The laws that should govern our interactions with non-native species can be confusing and vague. Here are some clear cut rules for residents of the state of Florida who may have issues with iguanas, pythons, Muscovy Ducks or other non-native pets on the loose in our yards and neighborhoods.

Exotic Animals Law: Here is the Florida law regulating non-native species like iguanas, pythons, monkeys, parrots, Muscovy Ducks, swans, etc.

372.265 Florida State Regulation of foreign animals:

1. (1) It is unlawful to import for sale or use, or to release within this state, any species of the animal kingdom not indigenous to Florida without having

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- obtained a permit to do so from the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.
2. (2) The Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is authorized to issue or deny such a permit upon the completion of studies of the species made by it to determine any detrimental effect the species might have on the ecology of the state.
 3. (3) Persons in violation of this section shall be guilty of a misdemeanor of the first degree, punishable as provided in s.775.082 or s.775.083.

Note that s.775.082 provides a definite term of imprisonment of up to 1 year; and s.775.083 provides a fine of up to \$1000.

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Iguanas and other invasive pet species are protected by **anticruelty laws**. Here is the Florida State Regulation that defines animal abuse as a felony.

Florida Statutes s.828.12 provides:

A person who intentionally commits an act to any animal which results in the cruel death, or excessive or repeated infliction of unnecessary pain or suffering, or causes the same to be done, punishable as provided in s.775.082 or by a fine of not more than \$10,000.

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Is it legal to shoot an iguana in my yard?

In the state of Florida, it is not legal or safe to discharge firearms or pellet guns in suburban or urban areas, so residents cannot legally shoot nuisance animals like iguanas or Muscovy Ducks.

The state of Florida prohibits county, city and other jurisdictional laws for firearms except for county gun show ordinances. Therefore, the state gun laws apply in every city and county.

Here is some information about **Florida gun laws**:

The state of Florida does not require a license or permit to PURCHASE a firearm (rifle, shotgun, or handgun) from a

and [Pineapple Press](#).



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gun dealer. All buyers must be residents of the state of Florida with valid identification. An instant background check with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement will be conducted. There is a 3-day waiting period to purchase a handgun from a retail establishment. All buyers must be at least 18 years of age to purchase a rifle or shotgun, and at least 21 to purchase a handgun.

It is a crime to transfer a firearm to an underaged person, or to a person otherwise disqualified. It is unlawful for the following disqualified persons to buy or possess any firearm: convicted felons (unless civil rights have been restored); drug addicts, alcoholics, mental incompetents, and vagrants; any person who has been issued a final injunction currently in force and effect restraining that person from committing acts of domestic violence.

There are specific regulations for CARRYING firearms, which cannot be openly displayed and require permitting for concealment. An application for a license to carry a handgun must be completed under oath on a federal form. The government will not issue a license if the applicant is ineligible. Applicants must be a US citizen and at least 21 years of age; they can not suffer from a physical or mental infirmity which prevents safe handling of the firearm, nor can they be a convicted felon, an alcoholic, currently under any injunction restraining them from acts of violence; they cannot have been convicted within the previous three years of any drug offense or violent crime including domestic violence.

In the state of Florida, it is unlawful to discharge a firearm in any public place, or on the right of way of any paved public road, highway, or street, or in any occupied building except in defense of life or property or in performance of official duties, or where expressly approved for hunting.

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Florida Laws Pertaining to Private Possession of Exotic Wildlife:

In the state of Florida, there is a ban on private ownership of certain exotic animal species. Ownership of certain other species necessitates permits and registration of animals with

the state and local authorities. The regulations are changing in response to growing problems with exotic animals breeding in the wild.

It is against the law to possess Class I Wildlife unless the animal was in possession prior to August 1, 1980.

It is against the law to possess Class II and III Wildlife without a permit from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Possession of Class I, II and III Wildlife is governed by specific regulations regarding caging requirements and other factors (see below).

The Florida Administrative Code, Statutes 68A-6.002, 68A-6.0021, and 68A-6.0022, address the categories of wildlife, possession and transfer of wildlife, and permit requirements.

Class I Wildlife pose a significant threat to humans and include the following: chimpanzees, gorillas, gibbons, drills and mandrills, orangutans, baboons, Siamangs, Gelada Baboons, Snow Leopards, leopards, Jaguars, Tigers, Lions, bears, rhinoceros, elephants, hippopotamuses, African or Cape Buffalos, crocodiles (except Dwarf), gavials, Black Caimans, Komodo Dragons.

Class II Wildlife can also pose a significant threat to humans and include the following: howler monkeys, uakaris, mangabeys, guenons, Bearded Sakis, Guerezas, Celebes Black Apes, Indris, macaques, langurs, doucs, Tonkin Snub-nosed Langurs, Proboscis Monkeys, Servals, European and Canadian Lynx, Cougars, panthers, Bobcats, Cheetahs, Caracals, African Golden Cats, Temminck's Golden Cats, Fishing Cats, Ocelots, Clouded Leopards, Coyotes, Gray Wolves (including wolf x domestic hybrids which are 25% or less domestic dog), Red Wolves (including wolf x domestic hybrids which are 25% or less domestic dog), Asiatic Jackals, Black-backed Jackals, Dholes (Indian Wild Dogs), African Hunting Dogs, Wolverines, Honey Badgers, American Badgers, Old World Badgers, Binturongs, hyenas, Dwarf Crocodiles, alligators other than the protected American Alligator, caimans, Ostriches, cassowaries.

Class III Wildlife includes all species of non-native wildlife not listed as Class I or Class II. This includes all non-native venomous reptiles and those species identified as Reptiles of Concern. If possessed for personal use, non-native venomous reptiles and Reptiles of Concern must be permitted, registered and permanently identified. Permits cost \$100 per pet. **Reptiles of Concern:** Burmese Python, Reticulated Python, African Rock Python, Scrub Python, Green Anaconda, Nile Monitor. Anyone possessing non-native venomous reptiles or Reptiles of Concern must have on hand a Captive Wildlife Critical Incident and Disaster Plan prepared according to FWC guidelines. The plan must outline how pet owners will secure or evacuate animals in the event of a natural disaster or other crisis, and include bite or exposure protocol.

No permits needed for certain non-native Class III species. The following wildlife species do not require permitting for possession for personal use: amphibians and reptiles not of concern (also nonvenomous and unprotected by the state), hedgehogs, Honey Possums, Sugar Gliders, Brushtail Possums, rats and mice, moles, shrews, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, ferrets, gerbils, Guinea Pigs, hamsters, shell parakeets (Budgerigars), lovebirds, Cockatiels, Canaries, parrots, finches, myna birds, toucans, Diamond Doves, Ringed Turtle Doves, Ruddy Ground Doves, buttonquail, prairie dogs, chinchillas.

Camels, llamas, wild horses, jungle fowl, common guineafowl and peafowl are classified as domesticated and do not require permitting.

The following Class III wildlife species do not require a permit to sell: poultry, hamsters, Guinea Pigs, domestic rats and mice, gerbils, chameleons.

Permits to possess Class III Wildlife are only issued to persons 16 years of age or older. Applicants must complete a questionnaire to show knowledge of general husbandry, nutritional needs, behaviors. Special caging requirements must be met. Applicants must show that the conditions in which the wildlife will be kept do not constitute a threat to the public or the animal. Anyone possessing venomous reptiles must mark the cage or enclosure with a sign stating

"Dangerous Venomous Reptile" and providing species identification. Location of antivenin must be given in a Captive Wildlife Critical Incident and Disaster Plan that meets FWC guidelines.

Permits to possess Class I and Class II Wildlife are only issued to persons 18 years of age or older. Applicants may not have been convicted of any violation of captive wildlife regulations, any offense involving the illegal commercialization of wildlife, or offenses involving cruelty to animals, within 3 years of application.

Permits to possess Class I Wildlife are only issued to applicants who demonstrate no less than 1 year of substantial practical experience (no less than 1000 hours) in the care, feeding, handling and husbandry of the species for which the permit is sought or similar species. Documentation and references must be submitted for approval. Documented educational experience in zoology or other relevant sciences from colleges can be substituted for up to 500 hours of the required experience.

Permits to possess Class II Wildlife are only issued to applicants who document 1 year (1000 hours) of experience, or take a written exam and document 100 hours of experience with the species for which the permit is sought. A score of 80 percent or higher on the exam is required.

Permits to possess Class I and II Wildlife are not issued until after the facility at which the captive wildlife will be maintained has been inspected and approved. Documentation must be supplied verifying that the construction of the facility, cages and enclosures meets municipal laws and county laws.

Class I Wildlife cannot be possessed on a property within an area zoned solely for residential use, or on premises of less than 5 acres of land area.

Class II Wildlife cannot be possessed on a property of less than 2 1/2 acres of land area.

Escape of Class I or Class II Wildlife or Reptiles of Concern must be reported to the FWC Division of Law Enforcement

as soon as it occurs.

As of July 1, 2007, Red-eared Slider Turtles were classified as a **Conditional Species**. Permits will not be issued for personal use. New regulations prohibit ownership for personal use of a Red-eared Slider Turtle less than 4 inches in length. All Red-eared Sliders owned before the new rules went into effect must not be allowed to breed; all eggs must be destroyed. Other Conditional Species include Nutria and certain species of fish.

Possession for personal use of **Prohibited Species** are not allowed in the state of Florida. Prohibited Species include: Gambian Pouch Rats, African electric catfishes, African tigerfishes, air-breathing catfishes, freshwater electric eels, lampreys, piranhas, snakeheads, most tilapias, Green Sunfish, Australian Crayfish, Zebra Mussels, mitten crabs, sea snakes, weaverfishes and stonefishes.

Permit violations and other infractions of the laws related to captive wildlife will result in fines and time in jail. Repeat violations can lead to fines of up to \$5000 and up to 5 years in jail. Repeated violators may be charged with a felony.

In summary, the exotic pet issue is a matter of private property rights versus government regulation of nuisance animals and protection of the environment, public health and safety. Federal law includes the 2003 **Captive Wildlife Safety Law** which prohibits interstate commerce in the big cats. If modified, this law could limit the numbers and kinds of other wild animals sold by the pet trade in the U.S. Currently, different states have different laws regarding exotic pets. More than a dozen states have complete bans on the import of most exotic pet species, prohibiting private ownership of captive wildlife. California, for example, bans all import, transport, and possession of captive wild animals for personal use.

Florida laws are modified on a regular basis as the state tries to provide a balance between the pet industry, environmental concerns, and residents complaining about exotic animals on the loose.

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U.S. Laws Pertaining to Import and Export of Wildlife:

All wildlife imported to or exported from the U.S. for any purpose must be declared to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and cleared prior to release by U.S. Customs and Border Protection or prior to consignment for export. The proper form (3-177: Declaration for Importation or Exportation of Fish and Wildlife) must be submitted and on file with FWS.

In the state of Florida, no person, firm, corporation or association may display or sell any wildlife, native or non-native, without having first secured a permit from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) authorizing the possession in captivity of the species and number of wildlife specified within the permit.

FWS has established a system of U.S. ports to allow the import and export of wildlife. Specific designated ports are the only ones used for all movement of wildlife into and out of the U.S. *The Port of Miami is a designated import port for wildlife. Since 1985, the Port of Tampa has been used as a non-designated export port for wildlife.* Most of the export inventory in Tampa is tropical fish, but reptiles are also common.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has a list of **Injurious Species** deemed harmful to humans and the environment. Pythons are not on this list, so Florida legislators have requested the consideration of certain snake species for inclusion on the Injurious Species list. Concerned citizens' groups have advocated for the expansion of this federal list to include the species causing problems in Florida.

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H.R. 669: In 2009, the Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act was introduced with the aim of reducing the negative impact of invasive species on the economy, environment, other animal species and human health. The Act would have established prohibitions on:

1. (1) importation or transportation between states of non-native species that are not included on the list of approved species
2. (2) permit violations
3. (3) possession, purchase, sale, barter, release, or breeding of such species

The bill did not become law, but it may be reintroduced in a future session of Congress.

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For further information on laws related to pets gone wild in Florida, go to:

- www.calusaherp.org/business/laws.htm
- www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu
- www.flsenate.gov/Statutes
- www.crime.about.com
- www.bornfreeusa.org
- www.fws.gov/southeast/law/lepermits.htm
- www.myfwc.com

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