

Help Audubon Track Invasive Non-Native Animals

NORTH, CENTRAL & GULF REGIONS



The ecological integrity of Florida's ecosystems face considerable risk from the continued spread of non-native plants and animals. Our state's role as a hub of U.S. import, coupled with our welcoming subtropical climate, allow stowaway and escaped species to flourish. While much attention is focused on Florida's invasive plants due to their potential economic impact, invasive animals are having devastating effects on Florida's unique ecosystems. Audubon has partnered with several groups throughout the state to help address this mounting threat. We are asking our fellow Audubon members and friends to be our 'eyes and ears' on the ground, reporting these and all non-native animals that have entered our natural areas. With your help, we can protect native birds and other wildlife!



Non-native animals threaten the natural biodiversity and ecological integrity of many of Florida's special places.



PHOTO: DENNIS GIARDINA, FWC

Tegus

Argentine black and white tegu have known breeding populations in Polk and Hillsborough counties (in addition to Miami-Dade). They reproduce quickly, can reach up to four feet in length, and their diet includes small animals and eggs of many species. Tegus are attracted by pet food and food waste and should not be approached if encountered.

Island Apple Snails

Island apple snails are becoming common throughout FL. Currently, we know little about their impact on aquatic systems or our native apple snail. Limpkins and Everglade Snail Kites feed exclusively on apple snails. Island apple snail egg masses are bright pink (compared to the pale pink to white color of native eggs) while adult shells are nearly indistinguishable from natives, aside from their notably larger maximum adult size.



PHOTO: CHARLES LEE



PHOTO: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Large Constrictors (*Burmese pythons, African rock pythons & others*)

Release of unwanted constrictors by pet owners has enabled these highly-adaptable snakes to invade many parts of Florida. They are fairly reclusive and eat a variety of animals. Amnesty programs relieve owners of unwanted pets while legislation aims to limit importation and sales, but existing breeding populations require control.

Lionfish

Indo-Pacific lionfish, released by aquarium owners, have rapidly established populations along the U.S. east coast and into the Gulf. Their high reproductive rates and voracious eating habits, combined with an absence of natural predators or parasites, result in a serious threat to native species. Handling requires care because of venomous spines.



PHOTO: VERA KRATOCH.



Monitors (*Nile, Savannah & others*)

These large lizards have become established in several parts of South Florida and are increasingly reported in central and northern counties. A particular threat to burrowing owls and gopher tortoises, monitors are carnivores who can exceed 6' in length. They are fast runners and excellent swimmers and threaten native wildlife and small pets.

Non-Native Freshwater Fishes (*cichlids, armored catfish & others*)

Florida's matrix of interconnected waterways and sub-tropical climate have made it very easy for non-native fishes to spread and thrive. Most of these species prey on our native aquatic species (fish, tadpoles, shrimp, snails), threatening the integrity of our native streams, lakes and wetlands and often decreasing the diversity of native fishes.



Others are certainly on the way...

History has shown that most animals threatening northern and central Florida were first established to our south. Staying informed about non-native animals in other parts of the state will allow you to help with early detection of these species— early detection and rapid response is our best hope for control.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Audubon chapter members, volunteers and friends can help in early detection and rapid response efforts by being alert to and reporting non-native species seen while birding or otherwise enjoying our natural areas. Sightings are monitored by scientists and land managers working to control the spread of animal invaders. These *free* tools are critical for helping identify and report animal invaders:

- **EDDMapS (www.ivegot1.org):** An online tool that provides distribution maps and species information, and a portal for online reporting of non-native plants and animals (efforts should be made to include photographs and GPS coordinates with sightings, whenever possible).
- **IveGot1 Smartphone App:** A mobile app (iphone & Android) that allows you to easily report non-native species through EDDMapS (allows easy upload of geo-tagged smartphone photographs).
- **REDDy (<http://ufwildlife.ifas.ufl.edu/reddy.shtml>):** An online training resource for learning to spot, identify and report non-native reptiles using EDDMapS and the IveGot1 app.

