

# The invasion

Business



In a patch of bright green grass, a cute marsh rabbit chews at some brightly colored green leaves of a marsh plant in the Florida Everglades.

It's blended golden brown fur shines bright in the sun and is complimented by some black waved fur on it's back. The innocent little creature continues to eat, chewing ferociously on the green leaves. An animal lover would enjoy this sight, gazing at the marsh rabbit as long as they could, taking in the beautiful and amazing moment. Suddenly, a large creature leaps out at the animal. This creature is 15 feet long, with very light brown skin accompanied with dark brown spots on its long body.

In a flash this creature is wrapped around the rabbit. It squeezes with all its might to suffocate the little innocent rabbit. The rabbit lets out pathetic squeals with its last breath. Its eyes are open wide and are bulging out of its sockets. The cracking sounds of the rabbit's bones being crushed and shattered into pieces can be heard from a distance. After suffering this awful attack, the rabbit is soon dead.

Being held in the creature's mouth, the rabbit is dragged away. This beastly creature is the Burmese Python, an invasive species of the Florida Everglades. These large pythons can grow up to 20 feet long and are causing devastation to the Everglades ecosystem. When Burmese Pythons become too big for their owners, a lot of them are set free. In south Florida, the Everglades is where most of these pet owners turn to when they are looking to release their pet. Since pet owners started doing this, Burmese Pythons have started taking over the Everglades.

They have been spotted in the Everglades since the 1980s, but have started growing in numbers since the year 2000, when it is believed they started breeding in the Everglades. Due to the release and spreading of the invasive Burmese Pythons, the Everglades ecosystem has been affected for the worse, and the pythons will continue to spread throughout southern Florida unless an attempt to control them is taken. According to the Definitions Subcommittee of the Invasive Species Advisory Committee, an invasive species is “ an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health” (“ Invasive”). Burmese Pythons are considered an invasive species, originating in Southeast Asia and making their way to the Florida Everglades via exotic pet trade (Weise). Although the exact number of Burmese Pythons that are in the Everglades is not known, park personal have been removing a lot of the pythons since the year 2000.

Linda Firar, a representative of the Everglades National Park, has said that park personal have captured or killed 1, 825 pythons since they started breeding in the year 2000 (Weise). That is a dramatic increase since the pythons started being sighted in the 1980s. The Burmese Pythons have been able to thrive in the Florida Everglades. There is plenty of food for the pythons to eat and there are no natural predators of pythons in the Florida Everglades (Kleinberg). The only animal that can rival the Burmese Python is an alligator, which is native to the Everglades. However, alligators will not be able to control the python population enough to where the pythons are not a threat to the ecosystem of the Everglades.

Scientists have recorded battles between alligators and pythons, with the alligators winning some and the pythons winning some. Choosing who will survive a fight is unpredictable. In one battle, a Burmese Python tried to swallow an alligator whole. The alligator ended up tearing through the python's skin, with both of the animals dieing (Howlett). So unless there is human interaction, the Burmese Pythons will continue to thrive in the Florida Everglades and maybe eventually Southern Florida. A concern with the invasive Burmese Pythons of the Florida Everglades is the native mammals that they consume throughout the Everglades and southern Florida.

Since there have not been any large types of snakes in the Florida area for around 16 million years, mammals such as marsh rabbits, foxes, opossums, raccoons, and white tailed deer do not really have any fear of large snakes (Dorcas). This makes it easier for Burmese Pythons to hunt and prey on mammals in the Everglades and southern Florida. As python population rises, mammal population falls. Researchers in the Southern Florida area doing nighttime road surveys have reported a dramatic loss in sightings for the mammals listed above. In the areas where the Burmese Pythons have firmly positioned themselves, there were no sightings of marsh rabbits or foxes, a decrease of 99.

3 percent of raccoon sightings, a decrease of 98. 9 percent of Opossum sightings, and sightings of White Tailed Deer were down 94. 1 percent (Dorcas). A decrease in these mammals will also cause a drop of the populations of other mammals that prey on them, because their food is becoming scarce. As the Burmese Python begin to spread throughout

different parts of Florida, the mammal population will be even more devastated.

Bird population is a major concern in the Everglades and southern Florida, and it turns out the Burmese Pythons are not picky eaters, consuming not only mammals, but birds also. In most danger are birds that spend most of their time on the ground or birds that cannot fly. They are unable to escape from an impending attack and their eggs are in danger of attack too (Dove, et al). Around 25 percent of Burmese Pythons collected between 2003 and 2008 had bird remains in them. Thirty six percent of bird prey came from the family of birds known as the Gruiformes, making them the most hunted by the Burmese Pythons (Dove, et al).

Four species of land dwelling birds consumed by the Burmese Pythons are considered to be at special concern by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission: Little Blue Heron, Snowy Egret, White Ibis, and Limpkin species (Dove, et al). The Wood Stork, another type of bird species that resides mostly on land and is included in the diet of the Burmese Pythons, is a nationally endangered species (Dove, et al). All types of species of birds, whether plentiful or endangered, are at risk due to the eating habits of the Burmese Python. Currently, Burmese Pythons have firmly positioned themselves in the Everglades and are spreading through southern Florida. It was thought that the salt water of the Atlantic Ocean would be a barrier to further expansion of the Burmese Pythons.

However, testing with Burmese Pythons has shown that these pythons can tolerate salt water. A team of scientists from the U. S. Geological Survey

performed a test with 24 Burmese Python hatchlings and a young Burmese Python. Led by scientist Kristen Hart, the hatchlings were divided up into three groups.

Eight were given only salt water to drink, eight were given brackish water to drink, and eight were given fresh water. The eight that were purely given salt water lived an average of one month, while the eight that were given brackish water were able to live up to five months. The pythons given only fresh water did not die, and the young Burmese Python was able to live in the pure salt water for a full 200 days and maybe could have lived longer if the experiment had not been terminated (Hart, et al). It is unlikely that the pythons will swim across the Gulf of Mexico to other southern states, but this experiment demonstrates that the Burmese Pythons can expand its territory through seaway paths. This experiment shows that expansion is possible not only northward in Florida to places with a constant hot temperature, but also southward to the local islands off the coast of Florida and to the Florida Keys. The Burmese Pythons population will continue to grow and spread unless something is done.

Scientists in Florida are trying out some new things to try and catch and get rid of the pythons. Firstly, the scientists have caught seven female Burmese Pythons and have implanted them with radio transmitters. The scientists hope that when the Burmese Pythons are let back out into the Everglades, they will lead the scientists to mating areas to catch male Burmese Pythons. Also, male Burmese Pythons are being trapped with traps that have the scent of a female Burmese Python on them. Lastly, park officials have actually trained a beagle, Python Pete, to sniff for and find Burmese Pythons <https://assignbuster.com/the-invasion/>

(" United States: Burmese Days"). Although these attempts may seem desperate, there is not much else to do.

Pythons are hard to find and catch because they are very secretive snakes that do not really interact with humans. However this is at least a start and an attempt to control the population of the Burmese Pythons. It is evident that scientists and state officials have taken a notice to this python problem. A new Florida law, passed in 2010, has banned Burmese Pythons as pets; meaning dealers cannot sell them to Florida residents anymore (Johnson). The banning also includes four other types of python species too. The state will hopefully continue to try and control the population.

If the Everglades is ever to be restored to what it was before, it is very important to control and hopefully remove the invasive Burmese Pythons. Works Cited Dorcas, Michael., et al. " Severe mammal declines coincide with proliferation of invasive Burmese pythons in Everglades National Park." Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, Volume 109, Number 7 (February 2012), pp.

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