



INVASIVE SPECIES **IN FLORIDA**

Florida is one of the easiest places for invasive species to flourish. The state is a hub for the exotic pet trade, and when the animals are lost or turned loose, they can quickly take over the local landscape. Pair exotic pets with constant boating activity, tropical wetlands and acres upon acres of undisturbed land, and the issue spirals out of control. These invaders aren't just a threat to wildlife – they can damage your property, too.

WHAT IS AN INVASIVE SPECIES?

Invasive species are plants, animals and other organisms that have been brought from another ecosystem and cause harm to their new environment. Without natural predators, invasive species kill native wildlife, reproduce rapidly and infest homes, causing massive ecological and property damage. There are about 4,300 invasive species in the United States, with many residing in Florida.¹

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GIANT AFRICAN LAND SNAIL

These eight-inch-long snails have invaded Florida not once, but twice. The most recent invasion began in 2011 in Miami. The population quickly exploded, since the snails can lay over 10,000 eggs during their lifetime. GALS eat 500 species of plants, ravaging yards and farm fields.² They also damage stucco buildings, plaster materials and automotive paint when they ingest the calcium to strengthen their shells.

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GREEN IGUANAS

While Floridians can keep these lovable reptiles as pets, they run amok once released in the wild. They'll eat nearly any vegetation – including flowers, fruits and veggies – leaving droppings in their wake. This is a large problem around pool and deck areas, especially since the waste often contains Salmonella. Green iguana burrowing commonly damages structures like sidewalks and seawalls, causing headaches for homeowners.

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CUBAN TREEFROGS

These teeny tiny frogs cause a lot of damage despite their small stature. Most home damage from Cuban treefrogs is caused by defecation. The frogs like to wait on outdoor walls for their prey, which means they frequently stain the exteriors of homes. They can also get inside toilets and sinks, take over bird houses and lay eggs in your yard's pond or pool.

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NUTRIA

Also called coypu, these rodents look like a cross between beavers and muskrats and have bright orange teeth and a rat-like tail. They were originally introduced to Florida as part of the fur trade. Now they spend their days munching on vegetation and destroying native species in the wetlands. Their appetite can wipe out crops and their burrowing can damage levees.

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RHESUS MONKEYS

Wild rhesus macaques were introduced to the Florida Silver Springs State Park in the 1930s as entertainment for tourists on the Jungle Cruise. However, they soon spread throughout the park and beyond its bounds, including in nearby Ocala, where they swarmed a deer feeder outside someone's home in 2017. Scientists recently discovered that 30 percent of the monkeys can transmit the deadly herpes B virus through their saliva, urine and droppings, so they will be removed from the park.³

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SOURCES

¹ <https://www.fws.gov/invasives/faq.html#q1>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/giant-snails-the-size-of-your-foot-are-terrorizing-florida/>

³ <http://time.com/5098520/florida-silver-springs-monkeys-herpes/>