

Rookery Bay Research Reserve

Update



Invasive Exotic Species: Burmese Pythons

No longer just an Everglades problem, pythons are expanding their territory into Reserve lands

In January 2010 staff and visiting investigators at the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve near Naples first began seeing large exotic snakes, primarily Burmese pythons, while conducting field research. Since then, more than 30 large snakes have been captured within the Reserve, clearly indicating these snakes are spreading out from their original point source near Everglades National Park.

Preserving natural habitats and native plants and animals within the boundaries is a priority issue for Reserve staff because these invaders pose a significant threat to native predators now in competition with pythons for food. The Reserve has begun to undertake steps to better understand the effects of this predator in its new environment and prevent further infestation to the fullest extent possible.

In September, 2012, land managers in southwest Florida convened at Rookery Bay Reserve in an effort to improve regional python management efforts and mitigate impacts to protected lands in southwest Florida. The half-day workshop included:

- presentations by researchers studying pythons in the Reserve and in Everglades National Park,
- facilitated discussions to identify knowledge gaps and available resources, and
- strategic planning sessions for effective communications and prioritization of management issues on a regional basis.

By inserting transmitters inside snakes and releasing them during breeding season, visiting scientists are able to locate and capture many other snakes attracted by hormones. DNA samples and stomach contents from captured snakes are studied so that more can be learned about what they are eating and how they are faring.

Partners in this research effort include the Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Dennison University and the Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA).

If you see a large snake that you believe to be a python in the wild (or your backyard), contact the "I've Got 1" hotline at 1-888-IVE-GOT-1 (483-4681).



Rookery Bay Reserve, located in southwest Florida, is recognized as one of the few remaining pristine, mangrove-forested estuaries in the U.S. As part of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System, it serves as an outdoor classroom and laboratory for students and scientists. For more information, visit www.rookerybay.org.

