

'Vicious' Giant Python Invading Florida

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Python molurus bivittatus. Image: Wikipedia.

(PhysOrg.com) -- New studies suggest a 20 foot snake, the African rock python, is making its home in Florida and could soon invade the Everglades National Park.

The rock python is "vicious", according to Kenneth Krysko of the Florida Museum of Natural History. It is even meaner than the Burmese pythons, which have been known to eat alligators, and which have already taken up residence in the nearby Everglades National Park, where they have wiped out thousands of native animals. Another major alien in the park is the boa constrictor.

Six specimens of Africa's longest snake have been discovered in a single square mile west of Miami, Florida, since the first was sighted in 2002. Krysko believes the original snakes may have been released by pet

breeders when they grew too big, or when the breeders were surprised by their aggressiveness. The finding of two hatchlings and a pregnant female suggests the snakes are settling in.

The rock python, like the Burmese python and boa constrictor, is not poisonous but kills its prey by constricting it and suffocating it to death before swallowing it.

With the Everglades National Park just across the road, the rock python may already have joined the other giant aliens in the park in wiping out the native fauna. According to Robert Reed of the U.S. Geological Survey in Colorado, the new [snake](#) might eat any warm-blooded animal it can ingest. The Burmese python is known to eat dozens of species, including white-tailed deer and even six-foot alligators, and Reed expects the rock python to do the same.

Another potential problem is inter-breeding of the African rock python and the Burmese python to produce a hybrid species. This has been known to happen in captivity, and while most such offspring are infertile, there is a possibility that offspring of the two species could be even harder and more deadly than their parents, according to Reed.

Kristina Serbesoff-King of the Nature Conservancy in Florida said that we should learn from past mistakes and try to eliminate the rock python while it is still confined to a relatively small area. One approach could be a python patrol, similar to the one the Nature Conservancy ran to try to reduce the numbers of Burmese pythons.

If the African rock python is not stopped in its tracks, the scientists agree the problem may be even worse than the Burmese python problem because the rock python is far more aggressive. In its native home the African rock [python](#) is known to attack humans, according to Krysko, and if hidden in a swamp, it could strike before you even knew it was

there. It could pose a particular danger for pets and small children.

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