

Record-breaking python found in Florida Everglades with 87 eggs

September 18 2012, by David Fleshler

A monster Burmese python captured in the Everglades has broken the state size record, stretching 17 feet, 7 inches, its belly bursting with 87 eggs, the University of Florida announced in August.

The [snake](#) was brought to the [Florida Museum of Natural History](#) Aug. 10 for examination. After the scientists are done with it, the snake will be mounted for exhibition at the museum for five years and then returned for exhibition to Everglades National Park.

"This thing is monstrous, it's about a foot wide," said Kenneth Krysko, manager of the museum's herpetology collection. "It means these snakes are surviving a long time in the wild, there's nothing stopping them and the [native wildlife](#) are in trouble."

Feathers were found in the snake's stomach, and these will be examined by the museum's ornithologists. The number of [eggs](#) was also a state record.

Burmese pythons, native to southern Asia, have established a breeding population in Everglades National Park, arriving in the United States via the exotic pet industry. Park officials are worried about their consumption of wildlife and competition with native predators.

"A 17.5-foot snake could eat anything it wants," Krysko said. "By learning what this animal has been eating and its reproductive status, it will hopefully give us insight into how to potentially manage other wild

Burmese pythons in the future.

The previous size record had been 16.8 feet and the record quantity of eggs was 85.

This particular snake had been under surveillance in the wild for more than a month. Two contract employees for the U.S. Geological Survey captured it March 6 in some bushes near the Daniel Beard Center, a research station in the eastern part of the park, said Kristen Hart, research ecologist for the USGS.

They took it alive and brought it to the USGS office in Davie, where they fitted it with [radio transmitters](#) and other devices and returned it to the Everglades.

Like a captured spy who becomes a double agent, the snake now worked for the U.S. government. It became what scientists call a "Judas snake," used by scientists to locate other snakes as they congregated for mating. After following the snake's movements for several weeks, keeping it under surveillance by air and ground, they recaptured the snake April 19 and took it again to their offices in Davie. But this was the end of the snake's use to them, so it was euthanized using isoflurane gas.

They caught her before she laid the eggs. Newly hatched [Burmese pythons](#) are about 18 inches long and have a high rate of survival, said Hart, of the USGS.

"When they hatch," she said, "they're ready to go."

Skip Snow, a biologist at [Everglades National Park](#) who specializes in pythons, said the capture was dramatic evidence of the species' reproductive capability.

"There are not many records of how many eggs a large female snake carries in the wild," he said in a University of Florida news release. "This shows they're a really reproductive animal, which aids in their invasiveness."

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Citation: Record-breaking python found in Florida Everglades with 87 eggs (2012, September 18) retrieved 5 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-09-record-breaking-python-florida-everglades-eggs.html>

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