

Burmese python habitat use patterns may help control efforts

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The largest and longest Burmese Python tracking study of its kind—here or in its native range—is providing researchers and resource managers new information that may help target control efforts of this invasive snake, according to a new study led by the U.S. Geological Survey.

Among the findings, scientists have identified the size of a Burmese python's home range and discovered they share some "common areas" that multiple snakes use.

"These high-use areas may be optimal locations for control efforts and further studies on the snakes' potential impacts on native wildlife," said Kristen Hart, a USGS research ecologist and lead author of the study.

"Understanding habitat-use patterns of invasive species can aid [resource managers](#) in designing appropriately timed and scaled management strategies to help control their spread."

Using radio and GPS tags to track 19 wild-caught pythons, researchers were able to learn how the Burmese python moved within its home range. The 5,119 days of tracking data led researchers to conclude that python home ranges are an average of 22 square kilometers, or roughly an area 3 miles wide-by-3 miles long, all currently within the park.

The study found pythons were concentrated in slough and coastal habitats, with tree islands being the principal feature of common-use areas, even in areas where they were not the predominant habitat type. The longest movements of individual pythons occurred most often

during dry conditions, but took place during "wet" and "dry" seasons.

Burmese pythons are long-lived, large-bodied constricting snakes native to Southeast Asia. Highly adaptable, these ambush predators can reach lengths greater than 19 feet and produce large clutches of eggs that can range from eight to 107 eggs. Burmese pythons were first observed in South Florida's Everglades National Park in 1979. Since then, they have spread throughout the park. Although [recent research](#) indicates the snakes may be having a significant effect on some populations of mid-sized mammals, it has also shown there is little risk to people who visit Everglades National Park.

Invasive species compete with [native wildlife](#) for food, and they threaten native biodiversity across the globe. With nearly 50 percent of the imperiled species in the US being threatened by exotic species, a major concern for land managers is the growing number of exotics that are successfully invading and establishing viable populations.

Florida is home to more exotic animals than any other state. Snakes in particular have been shown to pose a high risk of becoming [invasive species](#). The establishment of Burmese pythons in South Florida poses a significant threat to both the sensitive Everglades ecosystem and native species of conservation concern. For example, in the park, wood storks, Florida panthers and Cape Sable seaside sparrows are all [species](#) of conservation concern that have home ranges near the common-use areas of the radio-tracked [pythons](#).

More information: The study, "Home Range, Habitat Use, and Movement Patterns of Non-Native Burmese Pythons in Everglades National Park, Florida, USA," with authors from the USGS, University of Florida, National Park Service, and Davidson College, was published in the journal *Animal Biotelemetry*.

Provided by United States Geological Survey

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