

Florida takes aim at cat-eating African lizards

April 11 2015



This photo obtained April 10, 2015 courtesy of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission shows a Nile monitor

A cat-eating lizard native to Africa is being targeted by Florida state wildlife officials who say the creatures, known as Nile monitors, could be dangerous to pets and people.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Service said Friday it is "increasing efforts to locate and remove them," particularly along canals in Palm Beach County, north of Miami.

The lizards can be mistaken for iguanas and typically grow to five feet (1.5 meters) long. Their mottled coloring may be yellow, olive or brown.

Nile monitors have been known to eat cats as well as other [small mammals](#), burrowing owls, fish and frogs, according to biologist Jenny Ketterlin Eckles of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Because their diet is so varied, we are assessing whether this species may have an impact on Florida's native wildlife," she said.

Since the Nile monitors' breeding season is approaching, officials said this is a good time to ramp up their patrols and called on local citizens to report sightings and "secur(e) small pets."

They asked anyone who sees a Nile monitor, whether basking in the sun by the water or exploring their backyard, to take a picture and report it to IveGot1.org.

"Members of the public are advised not to attempt to capture a Nile monitor themselves," warned the Fish and Wildlife Service.

"Monitors are not innately aggressive but like any [wild animal](#) they may defend themselves if aggravated or threatened."

Other non-native creatures that have made Florida home include Burmese pythons and lionfish, which scientists have labeled invasive species because they harm the local ecosystem and upset the natural balance of predator and prey.

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Citation: Florida takes aim at cat-eating African lizards (2015, April 11) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-04-florida-aim-cat-eating-african-lizards.html>

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