

Florida python program nabs 900th snake, including new record

October 7 2019, by Richard Tribou, Orlando Sentinel

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There is more than one python-hunting army in Florida, but the one run by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission just hit another milestone including the largest python the group has ever captured.

The Python Action Team has removed 900 snakes as of Sept. 24 which includes 400 in just the last three months.

Included in that haul is an 18-foot, 4-inch-long adult female Burmese

python that weighed 98 pounds, 10 ounces, nabbed on Sept. 22 at Big Cypress National Preserve. It's the largest the FWC team has ever captured since its inception in April 2017 and the largest ever caught at Big Cypress.

The FWC's Python Action Team, set up to survey and if possible capture the invasive exotic species is separate from the South Florida Water Management District's python removal program, also established in early 2017. That program has removed 2,567 pythons as of Sept. 26, also more than 400 in the last three months. Also working on the python problem is the National Park Service. All three have a hand in managing state and federal lands in South Florida, where the python problem is the worst.

The presence of the pythons has been growing, though, since the early 2000s in the Everglades and expanding across South Florida. FWC said that the population grew as the result of escaped or released pets. The United States Geological Survey estimates the population still numbers in the tens of thousands.

For the FWC program, the record python was captured by PAT members Cynthia Downer and Jonathan Lopez. It's the second-largest wild [python](#) ever captured in the state, 4 inches shorter than the record, according to the FWC. Officials said capturing females is paramount to avoid them adding another 30 to 60 hatchlings every breeding period.

No. 900 was caught two days later on Sept. 24 by Bobby Monroe in the Everglades and Francis S. Taylor Wildlife Management Area in Miami-Dade County.

"Removing 900 pythons is a great milestone for our Python Action Team," said FWC Executive Director Eric Sutton. "These snakes coupled with the thousands removed by our partners at the National Park

Service and the South Florida Water Management District make a significant impact to protect Florida's native wildlife."

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Citation: Florida python program nabs 900th snake, including new record (2019, October 7)
retrieved 1 October 2023 from

<https://phys.org/news/2019-10-florida-python-nabs-900th-snake.html>

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