

Invasive Species Myths

By Andrew Wyatt

August 7, 2009

Myth: Reptiles are a significant vector of Salmonella.

Fact: Reptiles represent one of the least likely ways to contract Salmonella. Many common foods such as spinach and peanut butter are far more likely sources of Salmonella than reptiles.

Myth: Burmese pythons were established as an invasive species in Everglades National Park (ENP) through release by irresponsible reptile keepers.

Fact: There is no documentable evidence that the feral population of Burmese pythons in the Everglades can be traced to reptile keepers. To the contrary, there was a study commissioned by the South Florida Water Management District and conducted by the lead Biologist at ENP and Florida International University that suggests that all the pythons in the Everglades are closely related and therefore not likely from a slow introduction over time by reptile keepers.

Myth: Many reptiles have become invasive species through what has been termed “the pet introduction pathway” (introduction by keepers releasing their animals) as the result of what has been called “unlicensed sales” (Internet and reptile show sales).

Fact: Reptiles represent the smallest portion of invasive species in the U.S. Most invasive species in the U.S. can be traced to state fish & game departments and the federal government. The only snake ever put on the Injurious Wildlife list of the Lacey Act is the brown tree snake that was introduced to Guam by the federal government by stowing away on military aircraft. The concepts of “pet introduction pathway” and “unlicensed sales” as a high risk pathway to the establishment of invasive species can not be supported by credible evidence.

Myth: Adding animals to the Injurious Wildlife list will address problems of invasive species.

Fact: Adding the brown tree snake to the Injurious Wildlife list did nothing to change the situation in Guam created by the federal government. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that adding any animals to the Injurious Wildlife list would change anything in the Everglades or any other place.

Myth: There is good science being used to support proposed invasive species legislation.

Fact: The science is being “cherry picked” in order to support a decided direction. Science that contradicts the “fairy tale” being created by self-serving scientists to create a media sensation is being ignored.

Myth: The environmental and animal rights organizations that are the proponents of current invasive species legislation are motivated by a concern for animals and the environment.

Fact: The proponents are driven by the prospect of using the invasive species issue as a vehicle to advance their own ideological and fund raising agendas. The opportunity created by the sensational story of Burmese pythons in the Everglades is something they think they can capitalize on. They are pushing a political agenda not a good results-oriented policy. If they were truly interested in addressing invasive species issues they would be working with all stakeholders to come up with inclusive, pragmatic solutions. Their true agenda is to play to their constituents and end all animal ownership and use.

Andrew Wyatt is the President of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK) and has been an avid herp enthusiast for more than 35 years. He has traveled the world and has had his animals featured in a number of television productions. For more information about USARK, [click here](#).

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