

“The Python Bill”

By Russ Case

July 15, 2009

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Burmese python by David Northcott. My July 3 blog warned to expect fallout from the tragic killing of a baby girl by a Burmese python, and almost immediately there was resurgent interest in bill S373, which was introduced by Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) on February 3 with the goal of placing the entire Python genus on the list of injurious species. If you're not sure what such a listing would mean, refer back to my April 16 blog, when I was writing about HR669, the bill that was introduced last January and which would have made every pet other than a dog, cat or goldfish illegal.

Below are the steps a bill, the first step in the legislative process, goes through on its way to becoming a law:

1. A bill is introduced by a member of Congress. The person introducing it becomes the bill's sponsor. Senator Nelson is the sponsor of S373.
2. Once a bill is introduced it is referred to a committee, where it is reviewed, investigated, revised, etc. by committee members. According to the website www.govtrac.us, most bills never make it out of committee. Bill S373 was referred to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.
3. A bill may be referred to a subcommittee at this point, at which time further study may be conducted and hearings held. This is a time when public comment is solicited. It was prior to a hearing that the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife was inundated with more than 50,000 letters from reptile fans protesting HR669.
4. After hearings, if any, are completed, alterations or amendments to the bill may be made by the subcommittee prior to referring it back to the committee. Or the bill could die.
5. After receiving the subcommittee's report, the committee will vote to pass the bill on to the House or Senate. The House or Senate then votes on the bill, and it will either be passed or defeated.
6. If it is passed the bill will be referred to the other chamber (House or Senate), where the voting process again takes place. If it is not approved as is, the bill may be batted back and forth between the House and Senate until both agree on the wording. If the chambers can't agree the bill could die.
7. Once the House and Senate agree on the wording of a bill it is sent to the president. It becomes a law by one of two ways: it is either signed by the president, or the president takes no action while Congress is in session for 10 days. It can also die by one of two ways: the president can veto the bill, or if he takes no action by the time Congress ends its second session, the bill dies.
8. If the president vetoes a bill, Congress can still try to make it a law. It can be referred back to the House and Senate, and if both chambers vote on it with a two-thirds majority in each, the veto is overruled and the bill becomes a law.

Last week, USARK attended a Senate Subcommittee hearing during which Senator Nelson made his case for adding Python to the list of injurious species, and to stress his desire to get S373 passed quickly. At one point he unrolled a 16-foot Burmese python skin to show how large the snakes can get. According to a USARK notice he proceeded to characterize the situation with the python in the typical way the media has presented it in recent years: the snake is dangerous, it will destroy the Everglades and will run rampant all over the southern United States.

Reportedly Senator Nelson referred only to the Burmese python during his presentation, even though the language of his bill advocates the addition of the entire Python genus to the injurious wildlife list. As of this writing meetings between USARK and Senator Nelson, as well as other involved parties, are being sought to address this, in an effort to change the wording of the bill to represent the Burmese python only.

Once again USARK is advising reptile hobbyists on how they can help block unreasonable legislation imposed upon the reptile hobby, and how people may want to have their voices heard during this phase of S373's progress. Check the



website at www.usark.org.