

New Rules for Florida Herp Owners in 2008

New rules in Florida for red-eared sliders, nonnative venomous snakes and "reptiles of concern."

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has established new rules for people who possess or exhibit wildlife that recently came into effect or will become effective at the beginning of 2008.

Red-Eared Sliders

On July 1, 2007, red-eared slider turtles (*Trachemys scripta elegans*) became listed as a Conditional Species. People who acquired red-eared slider turtles after July 1, 2007, must have a permit. No permit will be issued for personal possession.

People who possess red-eared sliders acquired before July 1, 2007, may keep those specimens without a permit until they are legally transferred or disposed of. After July 1, 2008, however, no one may have a red-eared slider as a pet that is less than 4 inches in size. Those owning the turtles legally may not allow them to reproduce, and all eggs must be destroyed.

Nonnative Venomous Reptiles and "Reptiles of Concern"

As of Jan. 1, 2008, people licensed to possess captive wildlife, nonnative venomous reptiles or "Reptiles of Concern" must have a Captive Wildlife Critical Incident and Disaster Plan. This plan outlines how owners or exhibitors should secure or evacuate their animals in the event of natural disasters and critical incidents. Additionally, people licensed to possess or exhibit nonnative venomous reptiles or reptiles of concern must report any escape immediately to the FWC's Division of Law Enforcement.

Nonnative venomous reptiles are all species of venomous snakes and lizards that do not occur naturally in Florida. Reptiles of concern are the Indian or Burmese python, African rock python, amethystine python, reticulated python, green anaconda and Nile monitor lizard. People possessing any venomous reptiles or reptiles of concern must be permitted, paying a fee of \$100 per year. They also must meet new, stricter caging and facility requirements.

People who possess venomous reptiles are now required to mark cages and enclosures with a card stating, "Danger, Venomous Reptile." The card must identify the reptile, and it also must accompany the reptile when it is removed from its cage. A bite or exposure protocol is required, which provides the name of an emergency contact and information on what to do should a bite occur.

People who own nonnative venomous reptiles or reptiles of concern for personal use must have the animals permanently identified. Nonnative venomous reptiles must be identified by photograph or by implantation of a passive integrated transponder (PIT) tag, also referred to as a microchip. Reptiles of concern must be permanently identified by implantation of a PIT tag. The PIT tag number and specimen information must be maintained in the owner's records.

Owners of any nonnative venomous reptiles or reptiles of concern acquired prior to Jan. 1, 2008, will have until July 1, 2008 to meet the PIT tagging requirement. Any specimens acquired after Jan. 1, 2008 must be permanently identified when the animal is acquired.

People possessing venomous reptiles or reptiles of concern are also required to keep records of changes in inventory, which are a result of births, deaths, acquisition, sales or transfers. Records must be readily available for inspection by FWC personnel. These records also must be submitted to the FWC.

People who sell venomous reptiles or reptiles of concern must submit these records twice a year: once upon application and again six months later. People who possess venomous reptiles or reptiles of concern for personal use must submit these records upon application and when there is an inventory change.

Releasing Nonnative Species Into the Wild

It is illegal to release any nonnative species into the wild in Florida. As of this year, penalties for certain captive-wildlife-law violations have increased, and in some instances, people who repeatedly violate captive wildlife laws and rules can be charged with a felony.