

Coming to a Marsh Near You?

Imagine one of the world's largest snakes—the anaconda, a predator from South America that can grow up to 30 feet and 550 pounds—living in the marshes and slow-moving waters of the southern United States. This giant constrictor—capable of suffocating and swallowing our large native mammals—lies in the shallows, ready to strike.

Unless we act now to strengthen our laws to ban the import of invasive animals, it could happen.

KEEP ANACONDAS AND OTHER HARMFUL ANIMALS OUT OF THE UNITED STATES. SUPPORT H.R. 669.

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION ON INVASIVE SPECIES

Defenders of Wildlife • Great Lakes United • National Wildlife Federation • Natural Areas Association • Natural Resources Defense Council
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← The snakehead, a live food fish import from Asia that is an adaptable predator in the wild, is turning up in American rivers where it competes with native species for food and threatens the ecological balance.

Although they are known for aggression in captivity and can reach epic sizes, anacondas are still imported in large numbers by the pet trade. With confirmed reports of pet anacondas being released in the wild by their owners once the snake starts to live up to its reputation and growth potential, fears that these animals will take to our waters are well-founded.

Another huge constricting snake like the anaconda, the Burmese python, is reproducing and thriving in the Everglades and other south Florida wetlands. An estimated 30,000 Burmese pythons—the descendants of pet pythons imported from Southeast Asia and illegally released in the wild when they grew too large to keep—are vying with alligators at the top of the food chain, competing with and preying on other native wildlife, including several imperiled species, and threatening Everglades restoration efforts.

Scientists now must consider the long-term impacts of a gigantic non-native animal on an already stressed ecosystem that evolved for thousands of years without pythons. Land managers must deal with the expensive and risky job of python control. This is a daunting undertaking. With global warming, U.S. Geological Survey

scientists predict Burmese pythons might eventually extend their range as far north as Washington, D.C.

We must do what we can now to stop other animal invasions before they start, by passing legislation that will prevent other harmful species from entering the United States in the first place.

CONSEQUENCES OF A POORLY REGULATED TRADE

For far too long the pet, aquarium and other industries have freely imported live animals to the United States. As a leading import market, the United States receives hundreds of millions of these animals each year. Inevitably, some of them end up on our lands and in our waters—escaped from captivity or dumped by those who no longer want them.

Many of these non-native animals survive temporarily, a localized minor phenomenon that eventually dies out. But others, unconstrained by the natural limiting factors of their native environments, flourish and cause serious environmental, health and economic problems.

In addition to Burmese pythons in southern Florida, examples of established, non-native animals include:

→ **A Burmese python purchased at a manageable size from a pet store can be a brawny 8-footer within a year. Unable to handle such a big snake or find a new home for it, an owner will too often resort to illegally releasing it in the wild. In the right environment, such as the swamps of southern Florida, it can soon enough become a 200-pound, 20-foot, top-of-the-food-chain carnivore.**



- Asian carp, once confined to southeastern aquaculture ponds, thriving in the Mississippi River basin, with an electric barrier all that is keeping these giant fish out of the Great Lakes, where their damaging spread is likely to be unstoppable;
- Indian mongooses brought to Hawaii to control rats, driving rare native animals toward extinction;
- Voracious Chinese snakeheads imported for the specialty food market, disrupting the ecology of the Potomac River;



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- Venomous red lionfish from the Indo-Pacific escaped from aquaria, forming large populations in the western Atlantic as far north as New York.

Invasive animals are a common factor in federal endangered and threatened species listings. More than 400 of the 1,352 species protected under the Endangered Species Act are at risk at least partly due to competition with, or predation by, foreign species.

Not only can these non-natives spread widely, out-compete and eat our native



The red lionfish, an Indo-Pacific native introduced to the Atlantic as an aquarium escapee, has venomous spines that can inflict an extremely painful sting on an unsuspecting diver. It is also an aggressive predator of shrimp and other native commercial species such as snapper and grouper.



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The Gambian giant pouched rat, a pet trade import from Africa, carried the highly contagious and potentially fatal monkeypox virus to the United States in 2003, resulting in an outbreak that sickened 71 people in six states. In the Florida Keys, a thriving population of these rats—descendants of a group that escaped from a breeder there in 1999—was the target of a major trapping program.

wildlife and fundamentally alter natural systems, they can also carry infectious pathogens and harmful parasites. Diseases brought to the United States via imported wild animals include exotic Newcastle’s disease, heartwater, malignant catarrhal fever, monkeypox, rabbit viral hemorrhagic disease, chytridiomycosis and ranavirus.

STRENGTHENING U.S. REGULATION OF LIVE ANIMAL IMPORTS

The Lacey Act, the current law governing animal imports, gives the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) limited power to

declare species “injurious” and prohibit their importation to the United States. This approach, dictated under a section adopted 109 years ago, is excruciatingly slow—the average listing time is now about four years—and only about 40 species total have been listed. Experts repeatedly say this law is ineffective.

A new bill, H.R. 669, the Non-native Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act, would prevent the introduction of non-native wildlife species that pose excessive risk to the economy, the environment, human health or native wildlife. The act would require FWS to first assess the potential risks associated with a species proposed for import before deciding whether to allow or prohibit it. It would establish a comprehensive law regulating non-native wildlife that will keep potentially harmful animals out in the first place.

If enacted H.R. 669 would be one of the most important U.S. policy advances ever toward blocking imports of harmful invasive species—like the anaconda.

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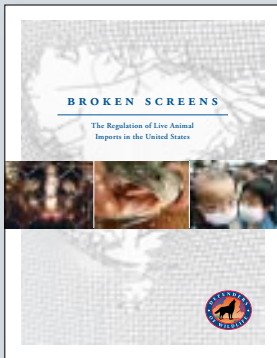
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FOR MORE INFORMATION



In 2007, Defenders of Wildlife published *Broken Screens: The Regulation of Live Animal Imports in the United States*, an unprecedented study that identified the scope of the trade and the risks associated with it. The 58-page report also examined the laws regulating non-native animals coming into the country and made recommendations for improving them. Enacting protective legislation, such as the Non-native Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act, was the top recommendation.

The full report and other information, including white papers on the economic impacts of the live wildlife trade and international law, are available at www.defenders.org/animalimports.

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SUPPORT THE NON-NATIVE WILDLIFE INVASION PREVENTION ACT, H.R. 669.