



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge



Photo: A.R.M. Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge by Hannah LaCava/USFWS Intern

EIRAMMPs

Collecting data to stop the spread of invasive species.



Photo: Green Iguana by Lauren Konrad/USFWS

As more and more exotic pets are released into the wild, they become a permanent part of the Everglades ecosystem. The most common pets are reptiles—iguanas, tegus, chameleons, turtles, ball pythons, and Burmese pythons are just a few of the main culprits. These invaders wreak havoc on the Everglades food web by competing with the native species for resources and eating many of the native species as part of their large diet.

Throughout the Everglades ecosystem, biologists use the Everglades Invasive Reptile, Amphibian, and Mammal Monitoring Program (EIRAMMP) to monitor nonnative and native species and their movements. At the Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, biologists conduct these surveys once or twice a week during the day or night, depending on the season and temperatures. These surveys supplement survey efforts made by the University of Florida.



Photo: Florida Red-bellied Cooter by Hannah LaCava/USFWS Intern

When conducting an EIRAMMP, biologists go out with at least one other partner—extra eyes spot extra animals. In the case of the refuge, a team begins a short distance either north or south of the boat ramp along the levee. At each checkpoint, biologists note the location and overall weather conditions. Then they spend a few minutes looking around for reptiles, amphibians, and mammals. The most common sights are turtles, deer, and lizards. There are also plenty of alligators, but those are recorded in a separate survey.

Once the route is completed and all of the data are collected, the information is sent to the University of Florida to add to a large collection of data from other locations. The surveys are a partnership between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge, University of Florida, South Florida Water Management District, and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Information collected during EIRAMMP surveys is important because it allows scientists to better understand the number and frequency of invasive species within a certain territory, and it helps scientists locate the same species again in the future. As the numbers of invasive species climb, the threat to native species that call the Everglades their home increases.



Photo: Common Musk Turtle by Lauren Konrad/USFWS

Protecting the Everglades and the native wildlife that live there begins with the public. Prevention is the first and most important step. If people can prevent an exotic species from entering the Everglades, then no further action is needed. However, once a nonnative species is established, the damage is often already done and nearly impossible to fix. Fortunately, everyone can help by reporting the invasive species they see to 1-888-IVE-GOT1 or by doing thorough research before adopting any exotic pets.