

What you need to know about Green Iguanas!



The Green iguana (*Iguana iguana*) is an exotic lizard native to Central and South America that poses a threat to native plants and wildlife.



Full-grown Green iguanas are usually between four and six feet in length, including the tail, which can make up about half the body length. Green iguanas can vary greatly in color. Adults are more uniform in color while young may appear blotchy or banded, between green and brown. In the morning, while body temperature is low, skin color may be darker to aid the lizard with heat absorption from the sunlight. Adult coloration varies from green to brown, red, and even orange.



Dark colored Iguanas can be distinguished from Nile monitor lizards by a spiny crest on the iguana's neck and back. Adult iguanas also have a loose hanging flap of skin under their chin called a "dewlap" that also has a serrated crest. Nile monitors have smooth necks and back and lack a noticeable dewlap. Unlike the Nile monitor, Green iguanas are not as aggressive and can be much slower to almost lethargic when the weather is cold. However, when threatened, iguanas can quickly escape.

Iguanas are not native to Florida and have been frequently released by pet owners unwilling to care for them as they grow larger. As exotic animals, they do not have the natural predator-

prey relationships that native species do and so their populations tend to grow unchecked. In Key Largo for example, nearly every tree, bush or basking rock has an adult or juvenile iguana on it or nearby. Although not a lot is known about their effects on native vegetation and wildlife, juveniles do eat insects and other small live prey items and may compete with native reptiles and birds for food. Not only may they have harmful ecological impacts, but iguanas are becoming a serious nuisance species in some areas such as the Florida Keys and the lower east coast. Frustrated Florida residents are increasingly asking lizard experts and nuisance wildlife trappers how to remove or repel wild green iguanas from their yards and pools.



According to the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (UFIFAS), Green iguanas in Florida eat shrubs, trees, landscape plants, orchids, and fruits such as figs, mangos, berries and tomatoes. Ornamental vegetation can be decimated by one large iguana taking up residence in a yard. In addition to destroying landscaping efforts, iguanas also cause problems by digging nesting burrows that can undermine sidewalks, sea walls and foundations. Iguana feces are odiferous, unsightly, and may harbor *Salmonella* bacteria. Because iguanas often prefer to defecate in or around water, it is not uncommon for an iguana to use a private pool as a defecation area. Large adults may be aggressive towards people and pets if they feel threatened. Adult iguanas spend most of their time high above ground in trees overhanging salt or freshwater sources, such as

bays, lakes, ponds, or rivers so when threatened by a predator they can dive into the water and swim swiftly away.

One reason iguanas spread so rapidly is that they have a high reproductive rate with a single clutch producing up to 65 eggs. Females migrate to the same nesting site for several years in a row and travel back to their home territory once they have laid their eggs. The incubation time for the eggs is about 12-16 weeks. Juvenile Green iguanas hatch and mature without care from their parents.

Green iguanas are diurnal and are awake during the day. They are "cold-blooded" or exothermic, which means they do not produce their own body heat. To stay warm, green iguanas bask in the sun and soak up the sun's heat. They generally live alone, but may be seen in groups while basking in the sun. Adult iguanas are known to occasionally eat carrion and to catch and eat live invertebrates.

HOW TO REPORT A NILE MONITOR LIZARD OR GREEN IGUANA SIGHTING

Citizens are requested to report lizard sightings 24 hours a day / seven days a week to the Sanibel Police Department at their non-emergency number (239) 472-3111. Unless there is an imminent threat to human safety, **DO NOT** call 911. All sightings for both species will be investigated by a contractual trapper for appropriate action. Verified sightings will be mapped in order to focus management activities and track population trends.

For more information regarding exotic lizards, please contact: the City of Sanibel Natural Resources Department, 800 Dunlop Road, Sanibel, FL 33957, or call (239) 472-3700. You may also send an email to admin@mysanibel.com.

The City Of Sanibel



Exotic Lizards



Educational Brochure

What you need to know about Nile Monitor Lizards!



In response to two confirmed sightings of Nile Monitor Lizards on Sanibel Island, the City of Sanibel has launched an Exotic Lizard Management Program. The Nile monitor lizard (*Varanus Niloticus*), is an exotic lizard introduced to SW Florida. It is a voracious predator that represents a severe risk to native wildlife species. The lizards were most likely released by irresponsible pet owners who became incapable of managing these large animals once the lizards reached adulthood and became too hard to handle due to their great strength, size and ferocious appetite.

Monitors have long, very sharp claws, a serious bite that is likely to become infected from the bacteria in their saliva, and a tail with a razor-like edge which they use as a whip when threatened. Some reptile handlers have noted they would rather wrestle a Nile Crocodile than a Nile Monitor and consider them among the most dangerous of all reptiles.

Although they look similar to another unwanted invader on Sanibel Island, the Green iguana, Nile monitors are easily distinguishable by their elongated head, lack of spiny crest and dorsal spines. Unlike the Green iguana, the Nile monitor's movements are quick and often erratic. Their large powerful limbs are equipped with long, sharp talons. A flattened ridge appears down the back of the tail to aid in swimming. The Nile monitor has a blue-purple forked tongue that darts in and out of the mouth when the animal is in motion and will hiss if threatened.



Nile monitors, which are native to Africa, can reach lengths upwards of 7 feet and are capable of moving great distances on land and in water. These animals usually live on vacant lots along vegetated canal banks and mangroves where they can evade capture by diving into an adjacent burrow or canal. Nile monitors are semi-aquatic and are extremely good swimmers capable of remaining submerged for up to an hour. Nile monitors excavate their burrows or overtake the burrows of native gopher tortoises and burrow to avoid capture and for reproduction.



One of the greatest concerns about a Nile Monitor breeding population establishing itself on Sanibel is that they have a very high reproductive rate and may lay as many as 84 eggs in a single clutch with the average being around 60 eggs. Monitors reach sexual maturity in two years. Their high reproductive rate coupled with a lack of predators to keep them in-check, make them a very serious threat to Sanibel's native wildlife.

The Nile monitor is an omnivorous predator and will readily consume almost anything that will fit in



its mouth such as snails, clams, crabs, fish, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals, including domestic pets. A major danger for Sanibel is that the lizards are particularly fond of eggs, including those



of birds, gopher tortoises, sea turtles and alligators. They climb very well allowing them to invade bird rookeries and completely destroy nests. This exotic species threatens the population balance of wildlife on Sanibel.

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Adult Nile monitor—www.animals.mongabay.com
Juvenile Nile monitor (top) Bill Love, Blue Chameleon Ventures
Juvenile Nile monitor (bottom) www.darwingambia.gm.2