

---

UCF Forum

---

5-26-2016

## New Florida Predator Needs to be Stopped Now Before Problem Worsens

Elizabeth Santiago  
*University of Central Florida*

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating.

---

### STARS Citation

Santiago, Elizabeth, "New Florida Predator Needs to be Stopped Now Before Problem Worsens" (2016). *UCF Forum*. 199.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum/199>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact [STARS@ucf.edu](mailto:STARS@ucf.edu).



## New Florida Predator Needs to be Stopped Now Before Problem Worsens

**By Elizabeth Santiago**  
UCF Forum columnist  
Thursday, May 26, 2016

It's official: Florida has been invaded. Not by aliens or soldiers with guns, but by something that has no natural predators within our Sunshine State borders. This danger lurks where few people go, but its disruptive presence affects us just the same.

Responsible for hundreds of human deaths along the Nile River every year, the Nile crocodile ranks as one of the most aggressive animals in the world – and just recently scientists discovered its ominous presence in the Florida Everglades.

State officials say the reptiles, among the most aggressive animals in the world, likely were brought to the area by unlicensed dealers and then escaped or were released from captivity. State wildlife officials need to do what they can to eliminate the predators and punish the people who took them illegally to the Everglades.

Once again here is an unsettling story about people's selfish ways creating another obstacle for Mother Nature to contend with. It's distressing to think how an action by a few can impact thousands of people and the native wildlife. It's even more disturbing that these people get away with it.

The Nile crocodile, unlike the American crocodile or alligator, does not try to elude humans. Being an apex predator, it welcomes the challenge from other animals and does not go down without a fight. They can grow up to 18 feet and lay 25-80 eggs just two months after mating.

Though only three have been spotted in Florida, it does not take much for this species to make itself at home. Scientists fear the crocodile will breed with our native elusive American crocodile or alligator and spawn an aggressive hybrid that will disrupt the ecosystem and endanger the lives of the public.

This is not the first time Florida's wildlife has been endangered by an invasive species. From the Burmese python increasing its numbers in the Everglades to the venomous Indo-Pacific lionfish taking over the Florida Keys, invasion has become an increasingly common problem.

I don't understand the desire for people keeping such exotic "pets" and then irresponsibly releasing them when they were no longer wanted. Whether the animals no longer captivated their owner's interest or became unmanageable, they were left at nature's doorstep to fend for themselves.

The state has taken some steps to combat this increasing problem. These initiatives include open hunts where the public can participate in removal of the various species with incentives and rewards. In the Everglades, hunts are targeted at the Burmese python, whereas in the Keys the hunts focus on the lionfish.

The state should be commended for its efforts to tackle the problem, but the initiatives have not leveled the playing field.

For instance, the 2016 Python Challenge removed 106 invasive snakes from the Everglades but it is estimated that after decades of breeding, the Burmese python population is more than 300,000. The annual 2015 Lionfish Derby eliminated 1,141 lionfish, but that doesn't compare to the 2 million eggs per year a single lionfish produces.

The removal of these invasive animals through hunts certainly benefits our ecosystem, but we need to do a better job in preventing these problems *before* they happen.

*Elizabeth Santiago is a UCF junior majoring in psychology and a member of the President's Leadership Council. She can be reached at [easantiago7@knights.ucf.edu](mailto:easantiago7@knights.ucf.edu).*