

New FWC nonnative species rules take effect May 2

New rules will help proactively protect Florida from invasive species becoming established in the state. The rules, which were approved by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) in February, go into effect May 2.

The new rules clarify rule language by defining key terms and add some high-risk nonnative animals to Florida's Prohibited Nonnative Species List. Using recent risk assessments and screenings, the FWC determined these species present a high level of risk to the state and will therefore be added to Florida's Prohibited Nonnative Species List:

- Mammals: meerkat/mongoose, raccoon dog, dhole, brushtail possum, flying fox.
- Birds: red-whiskered bul-bul, dioch, Java sparrow, pink starling.
- Reptiles: brown tree snake, yellow anaconda, Beni anaconda, DeSchauensee's anaconda.

The rule changes include a 90-day grace period for people to come into compliance with the new rules, since prohibited species may only be possessed by permit for research or exhibition purposes. The grace period, which ends July 31, will allow commercial dealers who possess these species to sell their inventory, since commercial sales of these species are no longer allowed in Florida and people will no longer be permitted to acquire them as pets.

The new rules also include grandfathering language for people who possessed these species as pets prior to the rule changes. People who have any of these species in personal possession will have until July 31 to submit a permit application to the FWC, which will allow them to keep their pet for the rest of its life.

"Our native fish and wildlife are facing a serious threat posed by various invasive species found throughout the state," said Kipp Frohlich, director of the FWC's Division of Habitat and Species Conservation. "This new rule will help prevent those species on the prohibited list from becoming the next Burmese python."

The public can help the FWC control nonnative invasive wildlife by reporting sightings to the FWC's Exotic Species Hotline at 888-IveGot1 (888-483-4681), online at [IVEGOT1.org](https://www.fwc.com/IVEGOT1) or by using the free smartphone app IVEGOT1.

If you currently possess one of the newly listed prohibited species and do not wish to obtain a grandfathered pet permit, **Don't Let it Loose!** Be a responsible pet owner and never release exotic animals into the Florida ecosystem. It is illegal and can be harmful to native wildlife. The FWC's Exotic Pet Amnesty Program helps prevent nonnative animals from being released into the wild by providing exotic pet owners who can no longer keep their pets with a legal and responsible alternative to releasing them. People may surrender their exotic pets at Exotic Pet Amnesty Day events or year-round by calling the FWC's Exotic Species Hotline at [888-Ive-Got1](tel:8884834681) (483-4681). All exotic pets, including ones held illegally, are accepted without penalty and placed with pre-approved adopters. [Learn more about the program](https://www.fwc.com/Nonnatives) at MyFWC.com/Nonnatives under the "Exotic Pet Amnesty Program" tab.

For more information about nonnative species in Florida, visit [MyFWC.com/Nonnatives](https://www.fwc.com/Nonnatives).