Florida is one of the four states in the United States with the highest number of non-native, or exotic, species. (Hawaii, California, and Louisiana are the other three). Southern Florida is home to more exotic animals than any other region in the United States. Approximately 140 of the 840 plant and animal species within the boundaries of the Everglades National Park are exotic species.

When an exotic species becomes harmful to the ecosystem, it is called an invasive species. Burmese pythons are an example of an invasive species that now lives in the Everglades.

**Directions:** Read the article, *Burmese Pythons in your Backyard* (attached below), and answer the questions below.

**Standards:** LAFS.4.RI.1.1, LAFS.4.RI.1.2, LAFS.4.RI.1.3, LAFS.4.RI.3.8, LAFS.5.RI.1.1, LAFS.5.RI.1.2, LAFS.5.RI.1.3, LAFS.6.RI.1.1, LAFS.6.RI.1.2, LAFS.6.RI.1.3

**Comprehension Questions**

1. How did the Burmese python make its way to Florida?

   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

2. How long can a Burmese python grow?
   a. 200 ft.
   b. 23 ft.
   c. 67 ft.
   d. 95 ft.

3. True/False (Choose one) Burmese pythons are classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in their native range.
4. What is one of the main concerns for having Burmese pythons in the Everglades, and why is it bad for the Everglades ecosystem?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

5. True/False (Choose one) From 1996 to 2006, nearly 100,000 Burmese pythons were imported to the United States.

6. True/False (Choose one) Burmese pythons can eat something that is double their body size.

7. Why are Burmese pythons difficult to detect in nature?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

8. Choose the best answer choice to fill in the blank in order to make the following sentence a true statement:
_______________ is really important for preventing the spread of invasive species.
   a. Habitat restoration
   b. Early detection
   c. Eradication
   d. Buying snakes only from pet stores

9. True/False (Choose one) Burmese pythons can no longer be acquired as pets here in Florida.

10. True/False (Choose one) It is legal to release non-native wildlife in Florida.

11. Who should you call if you happen to come across a Burmese python?
   a. 911
   b. Fire Rescue Department at: 786-331-4454
   c. FWC Human Resources Office at: 850-488-6411
   d. USNPS Python Line at: 305-815-2080
WHAT'S TALLER THAN A GIRAFFE, WEIGHS UP TO 200 POUNDS, & CAN SWALLOW DEER IN A SINGLE GULP?

YOU GUessed IT, THE NOTORIOUS INvADERS OF SOUTH FLORIDA...

BURMESE PYTHONS IN YOUR BACKYARD
Nary a cocktail party passes when a stranger, learning of my job, doesn’t ask about pythons. These giant snakes have captured our horror and fascination, but the actual tale is both better and worse than we can imagine. So for revelers and teetotalers alike, here’s the story...

Let’s start at the beginning. As its name implies, this species originates from Burma, south and southeast Asia. One of the world’s five largest snakes, they can reach lengths of 23 feet and swell to the girth of a telephone pole. In an ironic twist, they’re classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in their native range. Habitat degradation poses a problem, as well as being hunted for food, their beautiful skins, and captured for the pet trade.

If eating, owning, or wearing a python wasn’t enough, you can also drink them—in the form of a traditional medicine known as snake wine. Like it sounds, this is a snake-infused alcoholic drink. Never one to mix preserved animals in my drinks, this is one cocktail I’ll pass on.

The python’s dwindling population in their native range links back to Florida via cute hatchling snakes, sold as pets. Burmese pythons are a popular pet, so popular in fact that nearly 100,000 of them were imported to the United States between 1996 and 2006. They’re also captively bred here but like all babies, they grow fast, and those charming hatchlings can transform into eight foot long snakes within a year. Some pet owners, unable to care for their now giant snakes, release them into the wild. These careless, and not to mention illegal actions, have led to a massive problem.

Spotted intermittently in the 1980s and 1990s, the Burmese python population has proliferated since 2000. Today, we have tens of thousands of pythons covering over 1,000 square miles of south Florida, including Everglades National Park (ENP) and Big Cypress National Preserve. To make matters worse, these breeding snakes are likely spreading into new areas.

While the idea of such a formidable predator in the Everglades may be a frightening prospect, there is a good side to this story—attacks on humans are quite rare. Over the course of a decade, only a handful of attacks have occurred in ENP, with the worst case scenario being minor injuries.
All of these people were biologists, which to me, seems a little unfair. Nonetheless, according to my rough calculations, you have a 67 times greater chance of being hit by lightning than being attacked by a python. In fact, there’s only one documented case of a fatality from a Burmese python attack in the wild, and that happened nearly a century ago in Hong Kong.

In case you do encounter a freakishly large predator or one with lots of teeth, the best advice is to leave it alone. Never harass wildlife and give them ample space. However, for pet owners, the story is slightly different. There have been fatalities, although few in number, from large pet snakes in the United States.

HAVE I MENTIONED YET THAT OWNING PREDATORS THE SIZE OF A TELEPHONE POLE IS A BAD IDEA? IF NOT... IT’S A BAD IDEA.

If threats to humans strolling around the Everglades aren’t a big concern, what is the problem with pythons? The real problem is their appetites. Some of their meals are remarkable gluttonous, they can eat adult alligators, and one python was found with the remains of three deer in its stomach. Amazingly, pythons can eat something half of their own body size, which is like an average American man eating 95 pounds of pizza for dinner. Because of their voracity, mammals like bobcats, rabbits, racoons, foxes, opossums, and whitetailed deer have undergone massive declines (88% to 99%). Species like the endangered Key Largo woodrats and threatened wood storks are also at risk, as well as wading bird nesting colonies. This means that charismatic wading birds like roseate spoonbills, great egrets, snowy egrets, and white ibises, which have undergone 90% declines since the 1930s and 1940s, now face a new mammoth threat. To be the bearer of (more) bad python news, in addition to devouring mammals and birds, they also spread disease to native snakes.
What's being done to stop the Burmese pythons? Despite their large size, pythons are quite difficult to detect in nature because they're so well camouflaged. Fortunately, there's a whole slew of researchers from the University of Florida, Davidson College, U.S. Geological Survey, National Park Service, and the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) dedicated to studying the problem. Various techniques are being tried out to eradicate pythons. For instance, individual “Judas” snakes are implanted with a transmitter which lead researchers to other pythons for removal. Another promising technique is using dogs to find snakes, or pheromones to lure male snakes into traps. If all else fails, there's always hermaphroditism. In a cleverly designed act of gender deception, implanting male garter snakes with estrogen made them emit female pheromones, attracting other male snakes. This technique worked with another infamous invader in Guam, the brown tree snake, and may also work with Burmese pythons.

Finally, there's also just plain hunting. The Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission offers free training on identifying and removing Burmese pythons and offers incentives to humanely kill them in the Everglades. The SFWMD also sponsors a Burmese python hunt in the Everglades. This winter they reached the astounding milestone of removing over 11 tons of pythons that, if lined up, would stretch nearly 2.5 miles. But like diseases, early detection is really important for preventing the spread of invasive species. Once established, like Burmese pythons are, they're very difficult to eradicate. The focus now is on preventing any further spread of pythons and keeping their population sizes down.

So for the next cocktail party, when the subject of pythons invariably arises, you'll know what to say. Burmese pythons slithering around the Everglades pose a small risk to humans, but a huge one for other animals. Unfortunately, this isn’t a problem that’s going away anytime soon. That’s the mix of good and bad news about Burmese pythons, which is kind of like getting a half-empty, snake-infused cocktail.
PYTHONS & APOLLO

The word python, coming to us via Latin and Greek, has lofty origins. According to Greek mythology, python was a huge serpent or dragon living at the oracle of Delphi. Delphi, previously named Pytho, was considered the center of the Earth. Fittingly, python was the child of Gaia—a goddess personifying the Earth. Apollo purportedly killed the serpent for persecuting his mother, or maybe because he wanted to take over the oracle and the snake was in the way. Nonetheless, every 4 years the Pythian games—precursors to the modern Olympics—were held to celebrate Apollo’s victory over the son of Gaia, another pesky serpent.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT PYTHONS?

Giant constricting snakes don’t make good pets, and Burmese pythons can no longer be acquired as pets here in Florida. In the case you have an unwanted pet, turn it in at a Pet Amnesty Day. Remember it’s illegal to release non-native wildlife in Florida, and the penalties for doing so can result in a hefty fine and up to one year in prison. FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/nonnatives/amnesty-program/

If you happen to see a Burmese python, call the USNPS Python Line at 305-815-2080, the Keys Python Line at 1-888-483-4681, or report the sighting online at www.IveGot1.org.

If you need to request removal of a nuisance python or an unwanted pet reptile in Miami-Dade County, call the Fire Rescue Department at 786-331-4454.

You can also receive training from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to remove pythons or participate in their incentive programs. FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT: https://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/nonnatives/python/
Burmese Pythons in your Backyard Comprehensive Questions - Answer Key

Florida is one of the four states in the United States with the highest number of non-native, or exotic, species. (Hawaii, California, and Louisiana are the other three). Southern Florida is home to more exotic animals than any other region in the United States. Approximately 140 of the 840 plant and animal species within the boundaries of the Everglades National Park are exotic species.

When an exotic species becomes harmful to the ecosystem, it is called an invasive species. Burmese pythons are an example of an invasive species that now lives in the Everglades.

**Directions:** Read the article, *Burmese Pythons in your Backyard*, and answer the questions below.

1. How did the Burmese python make its way to Florida?
   - Cute hatchling snakes sold as pets, nearly 100,000 of them were imported to the U.S. Pet owners released them into the wild, now they are breeding and spreading to new areas.

2. How long can a Burmese python grow?
   - a. 200 ft.
   - b. **23 ft.**
   - c. 67 ft.
   - d. 95 ft.

3. **True/False** (Choose one) Burmese pythons are classified as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in their native range.

4. What is one of the main concerns for having Burmese pythons in the Everglades, and why is it bad for the Everglades ecosystem?
   - Their appetites. They can eat adult alligators, deer, and other mammals. Bobcats, rabbits, raccoons, foxes, opossums, and white tailed deer have undergone massive declines. Wading birds are also at risk.

5. **True/False** (Choose one) From 1996 to 2006, nearly 100,000 Burmese pythons were imported to the United States.

6. **True/False** (Choose one) Burmese pythons can eat something that is double their body size.
7. Why are Burmese pythons difficult to detect in nature?

Burmese pythons are difficult to detect in nature because of their camouflage.

8. Choose the best answer choice to fill in the blank in order to make the following sentence a true statement:

_______________ is really important for preventing the spread of invasive species.

a. Habitat restoration
b. Early detection
c. Eradication
d. Buying snakes only from pet stores

9. True/False (Choose one) Burmese pythons can no longer be acquired as pets here in Florida.

10. True/False (Choose one) It is legal to release non-native wildlife in Florida.

11. Who should you call if you happen to come across a Burmese python?

a. 911
b. Fire Rescue Department at: 786-331-4454
c. FWC Human Resources Office at: 850-488-6411
d. USNPS Python Line at: 305-815-2080